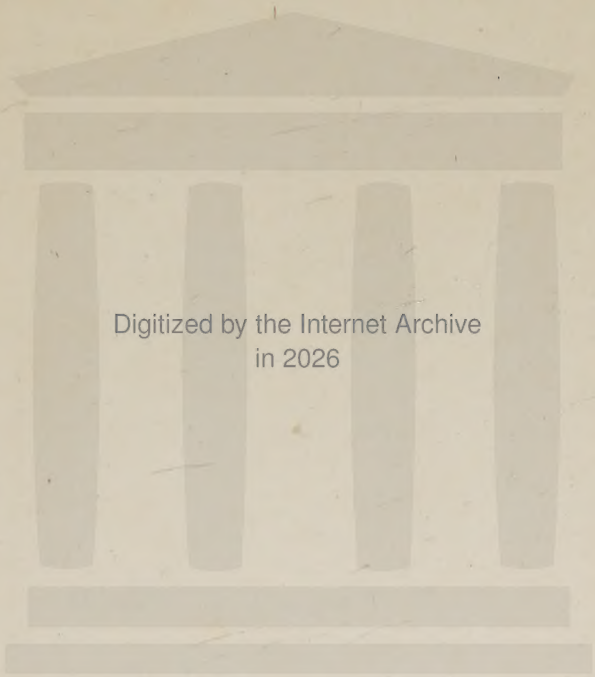
THE BOYS of COLUMBIA HIGH IN WINTER SPORTS

by

GRAHAM B. FORBES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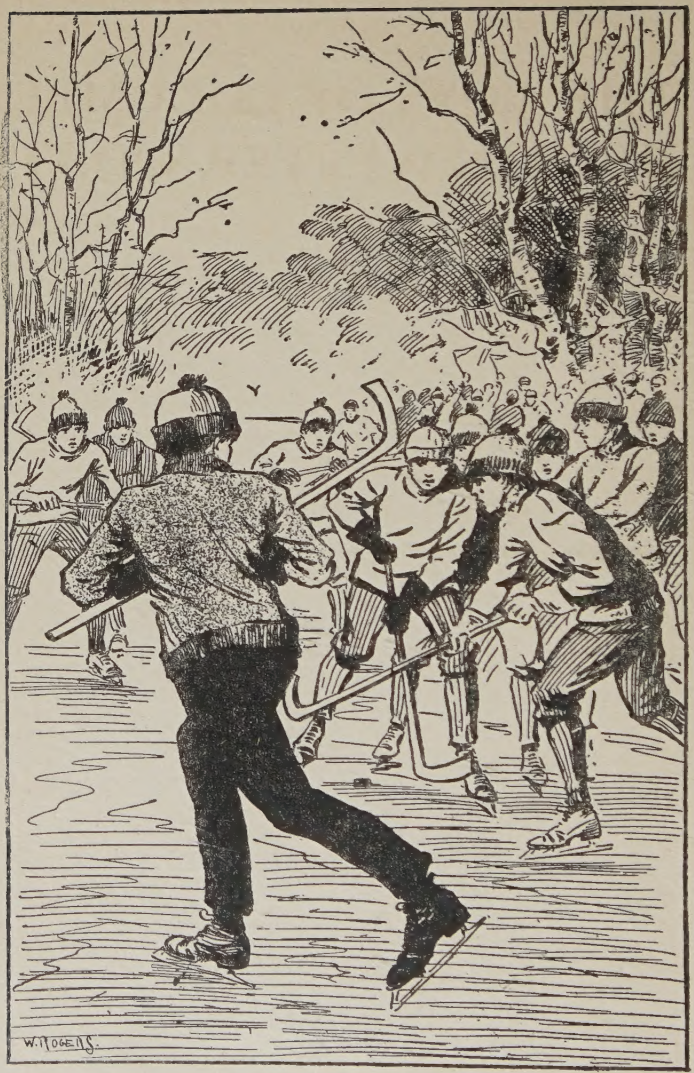

THE GAME WAS IN FULL SWING.—*Frontispiece.*
—*Page* 53.

Boys of Columbia High in Winter Sports.

THE BOYS OF COLUMBIA HIGH IN WINTER SPORTS

OR

Stirring Doings on Skates and Iceboats

BY

GRAHAM B. FORBES

AUTHOR OF "THE BOYS OF COLUMBIA HIGH," "THE BOYS OF COLUMBIA HIGH ON THE DIAMOND," ETC.

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BY GRAHAM B. FORBES

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THE BOYS OF COLUMBIA HIGH
Or The All-Around Rivals of the School
THE BOYS OF COLUMBIA HIGH ON THE DIAMOND
Or Winning Out by Pluck
THE BOYS OF COLUMBIA HIGH ON THE RIVER
Or The Boat Race Plot That Failed
THE BOYS OF COLUMBIA HIGH ON THE GRIDIRON
Or The Struggle for the Silver Cup
THE BOYS OF COLUMBIA HIGH ON THE ICE
Or Out for the Hockey Championship
THE BOYS OF COLUMBIA HIGH IN TRACK ATHLETICS
Or A Long Run That Won
THE BOYS OF COLUMBIA HIGH IN WINTER SPORTS
Or Stirring Doings on Skates and Iceboats

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The Boys of Columbia High in Winter Sports

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THE BOYS OF COLUMBIA HIGH IN WINTER SPORTS

CHAPTER I

THE RACE OF THE BOBSLEDS

"CLEAR the track, fellows!"

"Finest sledding we've had at Columbia for an age!"

"Frank Allen's got the peachy bob, let me tell you!"

"I don't agree with you there, while that *Skooter* of Lanky Wallace is around. It can go like a streak of greased lightning!"

"Both of you are away off. That bobsled Walt Ackerman had sent up from the city is a beauty. He'll give the others twenty feet start, and beat the whole lot to the foot of the hill as easy as falling off a log."

"Perhaps we're going to find out pretty soon which bob is the fastest, boys!"

"Listen to Bones Shadduck making promises; what do you mean by that, Bones?"

"They're talking of trying them out right now, in a friendly race!"

"Great stunt! 'Rah for the *Skooter!*"

"Oh, you *Comet!*"

"Three cheers for the *Get There*, and Frank Allen!"

A lively scene was presented on that afternoon in early winter. One of the hills bordering the town of Columbia on the Harrapin River had been given over to the boys and girls for coasting. In order that the risk of collisions might be lessened drivers were given to understand that they had better avoid the road that led over the hill, taking another that was somewhat longer.

Conditions could hardly have been improved on so far as sport went. A fall of snow had been followed by a slight thaw, and this in turn succeeded by another freeze. The hill was actually covered with a sheet of ice in places; and down the gradually sloping road a sled could soon gain great momentum.

Every winter this hill was the favorite coasting ground of all the young people of the town. There was nothing quite so fine in all the country around. Indeed, it was not unusual for boys to come in sleighs with their bobs from the neighboring towns of Bellport and Clifford, the former a large city about eight miles further down the river, while Clifford lay three miles above.

On the particular afternoon when these jocular

remarks passed back and forth among the crowd of boys and girls gathered at the crown of the hill road, the slope was dotted with coasters.

Younger ones with their flexible flyers had to keep to a track of their own, for it was considered dangerous to get in the way of the great bobs that, loaded to their full capacity, sped down with ever increasing velocity around the difficult bend until they brought up half a mile and more away on the level road.

Coming up the hill could be seen a group of well-grown boys, behind whom trailed several stoutly constructed bobsleds. The owners of these and their adherents were warmly disputing in friendly fashion the fleetness of their respective outfits. Indeed, just as the boy called Bones Shadduck had declared, they were at the time completing arrangements for a fair trial, with the three bobs starting down the hill in contest.

While they continue to climb toward the starting point, where scores await their coming with growing interest, a brief glance backward might be of more or less value to the new reader, in forming an acquaintance with some of these boys of Columbia High School, and their ambitions.

In the initial volume of this series the reader was introduced to Frank Allen, Lanky Wallace, Paul Bird, Bones Shadduck, stout Buster Billings, Jack

Comfort, and a great many other fellows who had to do with the life of the school, as well as with the sports which enlivened the vacation time of the pupils. Between the covers of "The Boys of Columbia High; or, The All Around Rivals of the School" are to be found a host of events such as might occur in any lively American town that is large enough to support a wideawake high school.

As both Clifford and Bellport also had high schools with lofty pretensions, it can be easily understood that there was intense rivalry between the three river towns for supremacy in various sports. Although there may have been isolated instances of unfair advantage being taken of the teams from other towns, as a rule these contests of skill and endurance were fought fairly, and the defeated school was invariably cheered to the echo by the victor. Some of these lively hard-fought games will be found narrated in "The Boys of Columbia High on the Diamond; or, Winning Out by Pluck."

Then later on, when the heat of summer rather put a damper on baseball, the cool river invited the boys who had red blood in their veins. Numerous were the fishing excursions taken, and swimming was a daily habit with many. There were other pleasures afforded by the Harrapin, as may be discovered by reading the third volume, "The Boys of

Columbia High on the River; or, The Boat Race Plot that Failed."

When fall came of course nothing could be talked of but football, and it was only natural that fierce contests should be held between the three schools of the neighboring towns. You will find it all set down in the pages of "The Boys of Columbia High on the Gridiron; or, The Struggle for the Silver Cup;" and besides the battles on the football field there are numerous other events brought before the reader.

Again did the Harrapin furnish enjoyment for the youth of Columbia, when the breath of Jack Frost covered its surface with a sheet of ice that was like glass. Here many delightful hours were passed in skating miles up the winding stream, or else engaged in winter sports of which the boys and girls of the town were unusually fond. That winter brought its rivalries in its train as well as the "good old summer time" can be understood from the title of the fifth volume of this series, "The Boys of Columbia High on the Ice; or, Out for the Hockey Championship."

But even the most enthusiastic of lads eventually tire of skating, sledding, and the bitter cold. Spring coming slowly, they yearn for other sports; and long before baseball can be indulged in the lure of the cinder track and long-distance running is apt to

seize upon them. It did with Frank Allen and many of his schoolmates, at that time in their last year at the seat of learning presided over by Professor Tyson Parke. If you would like to know what wonderful things happened in the early days of that Spring all that is necessary for you to do is to read "The Boys of Columbia High in Track Athletics; or, A long Run that Won."

Although Frank Allen and some of his chums were then in their final year at the high school, they decided that it would be well for them to take a post-graduate course before entering college. That is why they were still in Columbia High instead of being scattered over the country at various colleges, according to their fancy, or the wishes of their parents.

When finally the owners of the three reliable looking bobsleds, accompanied by their friends and backers arrived at the top of the slope, the conditions of the coming contest had been all arranged.

It was really a simple matter among friends, since all they had to do was to get an even start, and try to keep from running in to one another while speeding down the winding road.

Many of the girls of Columbia enjoyed these flying trips as much as their brothers, and of course were dressed for it, being warmly clad, from blanket coats to mittens and leggings.

Frank had upon his swift racer Minnie Cuthbert, who was usually considered his partner when country barn dances or anything of that sort came along, and Helen Allen, his sister. Just as the three bobs were fairly loaded, and awaiting the signal that would cause some of the other fellows to give them a running start a boy who had just come on the scene was hailed by Frank.

"Hello! Paul, you're just the one I want to finish my load," he called out, which was nothing singular, for Paul Bird had always been the closest chum Frank had.

"Well, you see, I'm on an errand, Frank, and hardly expected to do any coasting," remarked Paul. There was hesitation in his manner, for it happened he had discovered that the vacant space was right next to Helen Allen, in whom Paul had always felt considerable boyish interest.

"Oh! jump on, and help us out," urged Buster Billings, who was occupying almost as much room as two ordinary passengers, and had been placed next the front, perhaps, as a fine soft bulwark for the others to land upon in case of accident.

"Do come, Paul," urged Helen, sweetly; "see, there's room for you here."

That settled it for Paul.

"It'll take only a short time, I guess," he replied, as he surrendered to the temptation; "and besides,

dad's in no particular hurry. All right, Frank, I'll get aboard; but be sure you land us safe and sound at the bottom."

"I hope to land you ahead of Lanky and Walt, anyway, whether it's safe, or in a heap," the pilot of the long bob laughingly told him, as he settled himself in his favorite position.

"All ready?" he called out, a minute later; and as affirmative reply came back from the other two captains he quickly added: "Then let her go, all!"

Amidst a chorus of wild whoops the pushers gave the three long bobs a furious start, and gaining speed as their runners slid along the icy surface of the descent the sleds began to fly down the road.

It was all easy enough as long as they had a straight course; but before the bottom of the long hill was gained several bends had to be negotiated. Here it was that the skill of the steersmen came into play. The one who could control his fast racing bob, and succeed in turning these curves without a spill, was likely to come in ahead.

Frank Allen's start may have been slightly better than that of his opponents, for he immediately took the lead. Lanky Wallace and his *Skooter* was pressing him hard, and almost as close came the lively *Comet*, the latest thing in bobsleds known to the city dealers.

If any sort of accident happened to Frank there

was no doubt that the race between the other pair would be a close one, for they seemed to be running neck and neck—at least so some of those thought who climbing the hill, stood and cheered as the rivals flashed past with shrieks and blasts from horns announcing the joy of those aboard.

Now the great bend was just below Frank. He had a way of keeping watch on what lay ahead, though it was difficult to manage this at times.

The first thing he noticed as he swept down upon this turn was that some of the toilers alongside the track were waving their hands warningly, though what they shouted nobody could understand.

Then the *Get There* spun around the bend, and to the horror of all those aboard it was discovered that a heavy wagon drawn by a team of horses was coming up the road just ahead, and right in their way!

CHAPTER II

A MYSTERY OF THE SNOW DRIFT

"Look out, Frank!"

It was Buster Billings who gave vent to this whoop as the long and heavily laden bobsled whirled around the bend, guided by its dexterous pilot, and they discovered that there was a wagon directly in front of them.

Buster had reason to feel a qualm of alarm. If they shot into that team, he was so directly exposed that the chances were he would receive pretty severe treatment and perhaps get a broken leg or arm.

Fortunately Frank Allen was one of those fellows who usually prepare against possibilities. He had either figured what his course must be under similar conditions; or else was able to act on the spur of the moment.

It was utterly impossible to sweep around the wagon and team, because in swinging past the bend they had already reached the outermost limit of the road. Looking to some such necessity as this Frank and his chums had previously seen to it that

a vast quantity of snow was heaped on the outside of the road below the dangerous curve.

All that was necessary now was for him to swerve his steering gear. The bob immediately turned sharply aside, and headed for the snow bank. There were shrieks from Helen and Minnie, taken up by Dora Baxter on Lanky's bob just behind. Following this came a tumult of yells from the boys —and then the gallant *Get There* struck some impediment, spilling the entire cargo in a confused mess in the snow.

Lanky managed to guide his craft in such fashion that it did not imperil those who had been tossed from Frank's sled. Then came the third bob to add to the confusion.

Such laughing and shrieking and shouting as followed the upset of the three racers! A few bruises may have been received, but those who felt them were as a rule too proud to admit the fact, so after all the accident was taken in good part.

While they were still scrambling in the drift the driver of the team, having turned to the other side of the road as hastily as he could, jumped to the ground and hurried over to see if the victims of the accident needed any assistance.

He seemed to be a rather pleasant fellow, though Frank had to admit that so far as he knew, the driver was an utter stranger around Columbia.

Buster Billings had been almost buried in the deep snow, and now begged some of his chums to help dig him out. He was making all sorts of faces, as though he had had his mouth open at the time of taking his headlong dive, and in consequence had swallowed more than his share of the snow.

"Here's a fine pickle," called out Lanky Wallace, as he helped Dora Baxter up. "Anybody hurt?"

Amid the laughter and cries of the victims it was discovered that no particular damage had been done. The driver of the team expressed contrition as he went about assisting the various unfortunates to emerge from the drift.

"No one told me it was forbidden for teams to ascend the hill road," he explained. "I wouldn't have done this for the world, if I'd known. I don't forget that I was a boy myself once. Go back, and try your race over again. I'll turn around right away, to take the other road."

"I challenge you to another test, Frank—Lanky?" called out Walt Ackerman. "With a fair start I still believe I've got the fastest bob around Columbia."

"Take you up on that!" cried Lanky Wallace, who had found the other something of a rival in numerous ways ever since Walt came to town, for he had not been in Columbia more than a year or so.

"Count me in," Frank told them, laughingly.

"It was anybody's race, up to the upset. As there was no particular damage done either to any of us or our sleds we won't complain. So let's pull out, and go back for a fresh start."

Paul Bird, however, held back. Somehow he seemed to have come to his senses.

"Guess you'll have to count me out, then, Frank," he remarked; "since I'm this far down the hill I'd better be going along to town and doing my errand."

They saw him carelessly place his hand over one of his pockets as he spoke. Then his face immediately took on a surprised, almost startled look, as he commenced to fumble here and there, thrusting his hand into one pocket after another.

"What's the matter, Paul?" demanded Frank, seeing that his chum looked frightened over something.

"Oh! I'm afraid I have lost it!" muttered the other, as though hardly daring to tell himself the truth.

"Lost what?" continued Frank Allen.

"The—the watch!" stammered Paul, still running his eager hands over his person, as though hope died hard in his soul.

"Why, I didn't know that you carried such a thing, since your dollar one was taken from your coat last summer?" remarked Lanky Wallace.

"That's the worst of it," admitted Paul, disconsolately; "it was my father's solid gold watch. He asked me to take it to the jeweler's to get it fixed. I had it just before we started on this race, because I made sure to feel. And now it's gone!"

He certainly looked the picture of woe as he began to search around him. Frank and all the others felt more or less interest in the matter, though naturally most of the boys must have experienced considerable satisfaction to think it was not *their* father's valuable watch that was lost.

"It must have dropped out when you turned that somersault, after the bob struck a bump!" Helen Allen told him, already industriously searching in the drifted snow.

"Everybody get busy, and try to help Paul out!" cried Frank, himself starting to work; and as boys are always ready to follow a leader, the whole crowd could presently be seen scouring the immediate vicinity of the spot where the mishap had occurred.

It looked like an almost hopeless task, however. The watch might be picked up, but such a thing would have to be accounted sheer good luck, for the snow had been trampled by dozens of struggling feet, until so small an object would doubtless have been buried far beneath the surface.

"Must have been a valuable one, too?" suggested

Lanky Wallace to Ralph Langworthy as they hunted in common.

"It was," he was told. "I heard Paul saying just now that his father paid more than a hundred dollars for it a few years ago."

"Whew! I'm real sorry for Paul!" commented Lanky, who had a sympathetic nature.

"He feels badly about it, of course," the other boy went on, "though his father isn't a severe man at all, but like as not he'll punish him for his carelessness in riding on a bobsled when carrying that watch. Paul should not have done it."

"That's a fact, he hadn't," agreed Lanky.

"But I knew he would," Ralph continued, with a little touch of envy in his voice, for he too was very fond of Frank's sister. "When he heard Helen ask him to get aboard, and saw that the empty place was next to her. But I'd give something to find that watch. I'm mighty sorry for Paul!"

The stranger with his team had disappeared before the discovery of the loss of the watch was made. No one thought of him again just then, so earnestly were they engaged in moving this way and that over the trampled snow drift, eagerly searching for a sign of something that would gleam in the bright sunlight.

Frank had immediately started on a systematic search. This going around in all sorts of eccentric

circles he believed was next door to useless. Taking Paul and two other fellows with him Frank had begun at the very point where the upset happened.

"No use looking above this," he explained, as they began to move forward in close formation, so that not an inch of ground might be omitted. "It stands to reason the watch, being heavy, couldn't have slipped out of your pocket until you were standing on your head, so to say."

"That sounds like good logic to me, Frank," said Ginger Harper, approvingly.

"Oh! we've just got to find that watch!" asserted Herman Hooker, who in times gone by, on account of his wonderful voice, had always acted as the "cheer captain" when Columbia High teams were striving for the mastery with their vigorous rivals from Clifford and Bellport.

"Thank you for saying that, anyway, Herman," remarked poor Paul, trying to allow a smile to creep athwart his face, though the effort did not amount to very much.

And so for some time they continued to scour that patch of snow, until it seemed as though every portion of the vicinity had been combed. Still no glad shout announced that the missing watch was found.

"It's mighty queer where it could have gone to!"

Lanky was heard to say, in a voice that had a grain of suspicion in it.

Paul looked at Lanky uneasily.

"What do you mean by that?" he asked in a low tone; for next to Frank Allen, the leader of the Columbia High boys, Paul cared most for the tall, angular chap who was known far and wide by his suggestive name.

"Well, perhaps it's mean for me to hint at such a thing," remarked Lanky, with a trace of confusion in his manner, "but somebody might have picked it up without being seen."

"But you wouldn't dream that any fellow we know could be guilty of such a mean trick, just to plague me, Lanky?" objected the other boy.

"Certainly none of our crowd would think of doing such a thing," declared the tall boy instantly; "but if you look around you'll see that there are some fellows making out to help us hunt who weren't in the upset, or on any of the bobs. Several of them are the kind who wouldn't be above sneaking off with a watch worth what your father's is."

"Oh! I hope you're mistaken!" exclaimed Paul. "I sure hope the same thing," returned the other. "but if that doesn't happen it mightn't be a bad plan to remember all who are here. That's what I'm jotting down in my memory right now. It may count some day, nobody can say."

The search continued for another spell. Then by degrees the boys began to get weary, and in ones and twos they drew out, most of them to ascend the hill again.

Frank, being importuned by the others to have the race over with finally had to give in.

"Afterwards I'll quit the job, and come back to help you hunt, Paul," he said, as with the others he started up the hill again.

The race came off, and Frank won handsomely. This time Lanky made a slight miscalculation in negotiating another bend not reckoned nearly so dangerous as the big one; but all the same he met with his Waterloo there, and piled up in another drift.

The *Comet* proved to be hopelessly in third place, though its skipper stoutly declared that if given another trial he felt sure he could make good. But Frank professed himself as fully satisfied, and besides, he had promised Paul to help him hunt for the lost watch as long as the light held good, so he turned his sled over to Jack Comfort.

In vain they moved back and forth across the patch of snow where the spill had taken place. As evening gathered around them, with the sleds and their shouting freight still shooting past, for a moon almost full hung in the sky, Paul finally had to give it up.

"I'll tell father what a fool I've been," he said to Frank, as they walked home together. "I know how bad he'll feel, and I'd rather take a whipping than confess, but there's no other way. I'll haunt that place till the snow melts."

CHAPTER III

THE CHALLENGE FROM CLIFFORD

Down in the basement of the high school building there was considerable talk on the following day during recess. The boys who held the honor of the school in athletics particularly dear were evidently discussing certain facts connected with coming events.

Tom Budd, a wiry chap, who was quite a contortionist, forever turning flipflaps, hanging from his toes from the limbs of trees or parallel bars, as happened to be most convenient, and doing all manner of remarkable "stunts" to cause the eyes of his comrades to bulge out in wonder, was dancing around, and biting at a wide sandwich he had secured at the lunch counter near by.

"Here comes Frank right this minute," he observed, "and we'll tackle him on the spot."

"Which spot?" asked Buster Billings, who often felt an irresistible desire to say something smart, so as to raise a laugh, though many times it only drew down on his unlucky head the jeers of his chums.

"Now we'll hear what was in that note Frank got just as he came into school this morning." said Jack Comfort; "I saw that it was handed to him by a man who comes down here to Columbia from Clifford every day in winter. And that's what makes me think there's something doing."

When Frank, also eating a sandwich, joined the group, he was immediately surrounded.

"Frank, what have you got up your sleeve?" demanded Lanky Wallace. "We hear you had a note of some kind from Clifford this morning. Is it a challenge?"

"What a mind reader you are, Lanky!" laughed Frank.

"Then I hit it plump centre, the first shot!" cried Lanky, excitedly.

"Good! good! tell us the particulars, Frank?"

"Whom was it from?"

"What do they want to try with us this time—bobsleds, hockey, snowshoe running, or what?"

These and various other cries arose around Frank, who continued to look mysterious until the noise began to die down, giving him an opportunity to be heard.

"I'll explain it to you, boys," he finally said. "Ever since the last time our hockey team beat Clifford they've been feeling pretty sore up there,

because they believed they had some of the best skaters on the Harrapin."

"Yes," interrupted Ginger Harper, "and they go in for ice sports even stronger than we do down here. You'll see the whole river dotted with skaters any afternoon you happen along when the ice is in half-way decent shape."

"Go on, Frank, don't pay any attention to Ginger," urged several, eagerly.

"It happened that when the season was all over a couple of new fellows came to Clifford who turned out to be regular wonders on skates," continued Frank.

"Sure thing," again broke in the irrepressible Ginger, "their names are Toby Westover and Miles Standish, and what they can't do on steel runners isn't worth mentioning.

"Well," continued Frank, "I've heard some sort of talk from up-river way that they were laying plans to put it all over Columbia High this winter on the ice; and so I've been rather expecting a challenge, though I hardly thought it would come so soon."

"Who sent it, Frank?" asked Lanky, who was well acquainted with nearly all of the Clifford fellows, and had met them on many a hotly-contested field.

"Oh! it is signed by Coots, who is the captain of

their team this year, it seems," Frank explained. "He challenges Columbia High to meet the Cliffords next Saturday, if the weather is at all decent."

"Just for one game?" asked Lanky, anxiously; for if there was one thing he loved to do it was to play hockey, and sail an iceboat.

"He suggests that we make things more interesting by having it the best two out of three games, and if you think as I do about it, you'll authorize me to accept this challenge."

"Put it to a vote, Frank!" called out one enthusiastic student.

"Call some more of the fellows around first, so we'll make sure to have a quorum present, and make the meeting legal," suggested a more cautious boy.

That was no difficult thing to do. The moment the word went around that Clifford had sent a challenge to their hockey team for a new contest, looking to supremacy on the Harrapin, boys, and girls too, came flocking to the spot, until there was a seething mob around the recognized leader of the school, Frank Allen.

Presently Frank, seeing that time was passing and school would soon be called in session, read the challenge aloud. After that he asked them what they wished to have him do about it.

"I move," called out Lanky Wallace, "that Frank

Allen be instructed to send an immediate acceptance to this challenge, and inform Clifford High that our team is as ready as ever to give them a tussle on the ice, first game to be played here near Columbia, the second up in front of Clifford, and the location of the third, if there is any need of a third, to be decided by a toss-up!"

"Second the motion!" cried another student.

"All then in favor of our accepting this challenge say aye!" demanded Frank.

There was such a furious acclaim that the little woman who attended the lunch counter, and made her livelihood out of what she disposed of to the pupils day after day, actually ran into the big gymnasium room in alarm, thinking some sort of school riot had broken out.

"Contrary, no!" Frank thought fit to add; but quite confident there would be a dead silence, which turned out to be so.

"All right, then, I'll fix it so that the answer gets up to Clifford to-night," he told the assembled boys, whereat renewed cheers broke forth.

There were some of the boys, however, who did not look overly cheerful. They had no show of making the regular hockey team, because that stood almost the same as on the former year, when victory had been wrested from the fast sevens of Clifford and Bellport.

"Listen, Frank," said Ginger Harper, after all the noise had died out, "with a long winter ahead of us hockey oughtn't to be the only ice game we're going to play. Some of us would like to get up a race of ten miles or more on skates; and then again, how about iceboats? Lanky has been pottering on a new one, we hear, and I'm interested in another that's being built on the sly, and so as to surprise some folks. Let's remember to vary our programme some, and have home contests."

"Good for you, Ginger!" cried Lanky, who was rubbing his hands in glee at the fine prospect ahead. "Count me in that deal every time. I'll be ready to race you and that flier you're working on any day you say."

"Only let us all know about it, please!" called out Minnie Cuthbert, who knew very well that Frank was sure to be the lengthy boy's companion when the iceboats went spinning up or down the river.

"When will we have the first real practice on the river, Frank?" asked someone.

"I think by to-morrow afternoon, if the weather man doesn't fool us," was Frank's answer. "The ice ought to be pretty solid by then, and new ice holds up like everything. Every fellow turn out then."

"Oh! we'll show Clifford a few wrinkles that

we've learned since last time," boasted Jack Comfort, who was cover point on the hockey team, and a sterling all-around player.

"Clifford will come, and see, and go home whipped; but it's all in the game!" sang Tom Budd, as he hung suspended by his knees from a ring, for all the world like a big bat sleeping; though all of them were so accustomed to the gymnast's ridiculous stunts that they never expected him to act like a reasonable human being.

"I wouldn't be too sure about that, if I were you. Sometimes things happen that are not down in the Columbia programme. Not that I don't want to see you win, of course, but they do say those new players are dandies."

It was a boy named Hollingsworth who said this. He had formerly lived in Clifford, and while his folks now resided in Columbia he naturally still felt more or less in sympathy with his old friends up the Harrapin.

"You promised to go with me, and have another look for that watch, remember, Frank," Paul Bird said to the leader of the Columbia boys.

"I'll do everything I can to help you find it, Paul," was the reply. "I suppose you told your father what happened last night?"

"Yes, after supper," answered the other, with a deep sigh. "I always wait till then when I've got

any *bad* news, because he feels in better humor after he's had a good meal. But Frank, I own up that it was the meanest thing going, to have to confess what a silly fool I'd been. I promised that I'd do everything possible to find the watch again; and I haven't given up all hope yet."

"Did he say anything about punishing you, Paul?"

"No, but when I fail to make good he always does something," answered the victim of the accident. "Most times he simply denies me something I've set my heart on doing, and that rankles longest of all. But it sinks in, Frank, and makes a fellow determine that he'll never be caught doing that same thing again."

"Yes," said Frank, smiling, as the summons came to enter the class rooms, "but the trouble with most of us is, there are so many other ways where we can fall short. I'll wait for you after school, Paul, because I come later and get out so much sooner."

True to his promise Frank was on hand when Paul Bird came hurrying out that afternoon. They did not bother with anything else, posting away to the hillside where the accident to the bobsled had occurred on the previous afternoon.

A few small boys were sliding down the slope, which doubtless would soon present a lively ap-

pearance, though some of the fellows had arranged to seek the river, and try the skating.

Paul had thought to bring a snow shovel along, and with this they set industriously to work, meaning to go over the entire bank. When one grew tired the other took hold, and in this fashion by slow degrees they examined every bit of the trampled snow.

An hour passed, and Paul's face began to grow longer than ever.

"It looks as though we wouldn't find it after all, Frank!" he said, dejectedly.

"Well, one thing is as sure as can be," the other told him. "That watch isn't anywhere behind us, for we've searched close enough to have found a pin, almost. And we're close to the end of the patch right now."

"There's only one chance in a thousand that when I was thrown over it could have left my pocket, and gone a considerable distance further down the hill?" ventured Paul, though the idea did not seem to give him much reason for renewed hope.

"We'll take a turn for some little distance down, pretty soon," his chum assured him; "but while I was shoveling just now, a sudden idea seemed to flash into my head."

"You mean you had an inspiration; don't you, Frank?"

"Well, call it whatever you've a mind to," the other continued. "It may be there's nothing worth while in my idea, but when you're up against a dead wall it always pays to take a fighting chance."

"Tell me what it is, then, please?" asked Paul, eagerly.

"I got to thinking about that man with the team and wagon," Frank explained. "Now for one I never had set eyes on him before and I asked several other fellows if they had, but he seemed to be a perfect stranger, perhaps a newcomer in this neighborhood. I was wondering if he had picked up your father's gold watch, when helping us get out of the drift, and talking so finely about remembering he had once been a boy himself."

CHAPTER IV

UNPLEASANT NEWS

"FRANK, I honestly believe you may have struck the right nail on the head!" exclaimed Paul, after a brief spell of thinking.

"Oh! well, I wouldn't say that," Frank told him, not wishing the other to become too sanguine, since his disappointment must prove all the more severe if in the end the suspicion turned out to be unfounded.

"But the man was there, hustling around, and pretending to help us out of that drift," urged Paul.

"He really acted as though he felt sorry for having been the cause of the upset. That was the way I thought about it," continued Frank.

"But that may have been all put on, don't you see?" Paul told him, as though he had already commenced to hug this new idea to his heart.

"It looks as though somebody must have picked the watch up, Paul!"

"Why not that man as well as the next one?

You say he was a stranger to you, Frank, and seems to me you ought to know pretty much all the farmers around this section of country."

"Not only that," admitted Frank, "but try as hard as I might I couldn't run across a single fellow who did know him. That's the queerest part of it."

"The more we speak of it the stronger I seem to believe that man got dad's gold watch!" declared Paul.

"But remember the old saying, Paul, that it's poor policy to have all your eggs in one basket," the other warned him.

"Oh! don't think I'm such a fool as that, Frank. I'll come back here every chance I get, and keep on skirmishing around. I'll have hopes of finding that watch somewhere that we've chanced to pass over. But all the same I'll also try to learn who that stranger is, and where he lives."

"All right," said Frank. "If you need any help call on me."

"That's just what I'd have expected you to say, because you're the best friend I've got in Columbia. But Frank, you mustn't think I mean to walk up to that man's door, call him out, cover him with a gun, and demand that he hand over something he was seen to pick up on the day of the bobsled spill."

Frank laughed at the idea. He also wanted to

cheer the other up somewhat, for that anxious look on Paul's usually pleasant face went to his heart.

"How would you go about finding out who he is?" he asked Paul.

"Oh! well, I hadn't given that part of it a thought as yet," admitted the other, "but then it oughtn't to be so hard a job, when you stop to think that he was coming out of town at the time."

"And I noticed he had quite a lot of things in the wagon," added Frank.

"That's the idea; he must have been dealing with several of our merchants, and they'd remember something about him."

"Now you're on the track of the answer. Both of us noticed the team close enough to be able to give some sort of half-way decent description of it."

"And the man, too," added the second boy, with increasing eagerness.

"He had a pleasant looking face, and wore a small gray mustache, unless I'm away off in my recollection; how about it?" asked Frank.

"Yes, that's the same thing I seem to remember!" cried Paul. "And when he talked his voice was smooth as silk, while there was a glitter in his eyes."

"Oh! I wouldn't say just that, if I were you,

Paul," objected the other, fearing that the new suspicion was apt to make his chum go to extremes.

"Well, they snapped, anyway, and you'll have to admit that much, Frank?"

"I thought at the time it was what you might call a merry twinkle," said the other. "If the man happened to be a friend of mine, I might like those eyes. Still, if he took something that didn't belong to him he's a thief, all the same."

They continued their search as the sun drew closer to the horizon. The merry shouts of the coasters who went flitting past, or sturdily climbled the gradual slope again, dragging their sleds after them, seemed out of place to poor Paul, whose heart was very heavy.

"I'll never forgive myself for being so foolish as to ride on a bob when I was carrying so valuable a thing in my pocket," he told Frank, as they finally came to the conclusion that all their efforts were unavailing.

"And I'm mighty sorry I ever coaxed you to take the ride, Paul."

"Oh! but you weren't a bit to blame!" burst out the other, warmly. "How should you know what sort of an errand I was on? Something told me I shouldn't do it, but there was that vacant place—and Helen asked me, too."

Perhaps Frank smiled as he turned his head aside.

He just could not help it, for of course he knew Paul was very fond of his sister.

"There's one thing I'm going to do on my own account, which may turn out to be of some help to you, Paul," he remarked, as they started down the hill, for the winter day had come to a close, and nightfall was at hand.

"Tell me what you mean, please," his chum begged.

"While you're trying to get a trace of that stranger," Frank explained, "I might be finding out just who was around there besides the fellows on the three upset bobs."

"Yes, I believe you said something about that before," Paul muttered. "I didn't notice anything much myself, only that a number of fellows who had been climbing the hill came and helped hunt for the watch."

"I'm not going to mention names just yet," said Frank, "but unless I'm mistaken there were at least two boys hanging around that place who don't bear any too good reputations in Columbia."

"That might be another little clue, Frank."

"It'll stand investigating, anyhow," he was told. in Frank's quiet yet determined way. "When a mystery like this crops up it means you've got to do considerable groping in the dark before you get on the right track."

"There's one thing I must tell you, Frank, though it nearly breaks my heart to do it," Paul presently confessed, and his chum could tell from the way he swallowed hard that he was struggling with emotion.

"You've put me on my guard, old fellow," he replied, trying to appear jocular, in fact, because he saw that Paul was deeply depressed in spirits, "so now pitch in and spin your yarn."

"You'll have to count me out, I'm afraid, Frank, unless something like a miracle happens between now and Saturday."

"Out—of what?" demanded the other, quickly.

"The hockey game with Clifford," Paul continued, with a deep sigh.

"Then your father has forbidden you to play?"

"Yes."

"You said he always punished you by denying you some pleasure, I remember," said Frank, slowly, as he considered what a sad disappointment this must be for his chum, who cared so much for the swift ice game.

"That's what he has done all my life, Paul. I never had a licking, like most other boys. I've many a time wished he *would* take me out in the woodshed, and use a strap, for then it would have been over and done with; but the other way kept hurting for days, and sometimes weeks."

"But it set you to thinking, and that's what your

father meant it should, of course," Frank told him. "In this case, though, we're all going to share your punishment, I'm afraid, Paul."

"I don't understand what you mean, Frank?"

"In this way," the other explained. "You're our left wing in the game; and when I say that we've won more than a few hot games of hockey just through the way you covered your territory, and sent the puck home, I'm telling the honest truth. We'll have to hustle to find a substitute to take your place, and there isn't a single fellow in Columbia High who can do justice to the job."

Of course Paul felt a thrill of pleasure shoot through him, for no boy ever lived who would not be proud to know his comrades appreciated him so highly. At the same time Paul was far from conceited.

"Oh! I hope you're estimating me too highly, Paul!" he exclaimed. "You're sort of prejudiced in my favor, so to say. There are plenty of scrappy players who can take on the duties of left wing, and help beat Clifford again. Don't let that bother you."

"It's going to give me something to think about, I tell you!" declared Frank.

"How about Hazen, who's been trying for a place on the team this long time?" Paul suggested, to show that his heart was wrapped up in Columbia winning, whether he took part in the match or not.

"We may have to fall back on him; but Hazen is never to be depended on," Frank answered. "One minute he does something brilliant, and the next makes the worst sort of bonehead play that rattles the whole team. I'd rather have a steady, reliable player than one of these fly-up-the-creek kind. They never forget they're being watched by a thousand pair of eyes, and so play to the grandstand all the while."

"Then there's Spruce Bentley," continued the other, meditatively.

"What I said about Hazen would apply equally well to Bentley."

"How about Clements, then?" continued Paul.

At that his comrade laughed merrily.

"Why, he's like an ice wagon, Paul!" he declared. "Honest, I'd as soon think of having Buster Billings on the team as that heavy weight. He can make good in football, because he's like a stone wall; but to be a hockey player, as you know, one has to be agile and quick."

"Then it's got to be either Hazen or Bentley, I'm afraid. Let's hope whoever plays will have one of his good days, and that the game will be won in dashing style. If all we hear about the new players up-river way is true, they're going to be a tough team to beat this season."

"Clifford never was anything but hard to beat,"

admitted the other boy, who had long ago learned not to underestimate a foe. "The fact of the matter is they fight like tigers up to the very last second; and if they have to go down to defeat it's always with their colors flying. I'd be better satisfied in my mind if only we could find that watch before Saturday, so that your father'd relent."

"And as for me," Paul sighed, "I'd be the happiest fellow in Columbia, barring none."

"If I thought it'd be any good," mused Frank, as they came near the spot where their paths diverged, "I'd be tempted to have a heart-to-heart talk with your dad, and ask him to punish you in some other way, so that the whole school wouldn't be punished, too."

"Please don't try it," begged Paul. "I know him better than you do. He'd feel doubly sorry that the rest had to suffer, but the lesson would be all the more valuable to me. My father means just what he says. He has an unbending will, and when he said I shouldn't play hockey this winter unless his watch was found, nothing would make him change his mind."

Shortly afterward Frank said good night.

"Cheer up, Paul," he told him; "perhaps it may all come out right yet. It's always the darkest before dawn, they say."

Nevertheless, Frank was worried over the situa-

tion. The more he remembered the brilliant work of Paul on the victorious hockey team of the past seasons, the greater became his fear that they would find it a difficult matter to secure a substitute. And with an improved line-up on the part of Clifford, defeat stared the home team in the face.

CHAPTER V

THE DAY OF THE HOCKEY GAME

SATURDAY was all that the most enthusiastic lover of hockey could wish for. The sun shone from an unclouded sky, the air was bracing, and there seemed to be very little wind to bother the players.

As for the ice it appeared as though conditions had favored them, for all the way up the Harrapin it was smooth as glass.

The river presented a gala appearance immediately after noon on the day of the expected match. Hundreds of young people were abroad, and such was the interest taken in Columbia by the citizens that many older ones made their way down to the bank of the Harrapin to observe what took place.

"Look at them streaming down from Clifford, would you?" cried Buster Billings, as he skated lazily here and there, with every one dodging as he approached for a collision with a stone wall was hardly a more serious thing than coming up against Buster when on skates.

"The whole town will be here, I do believe!" Helen Allen declared. "Why, sleighs are just streaming along the roads on both sides of the river and see how they line up across there!"

"But most of Clifford High is banked on our side, you notice," remarked Minnie Cuthbert, who was of course in the company of her chum.

"That's so they can cheer, and encourage their players, and wave their school colors," explained Buster, as though he were a fountain of knowledge, ready to be tapped for the benefit of others.

"Well, thank goodness, here's our old reliable Herman Hooker, with his big megaphone, come to get Columbia in line for business!" called out a rooter, as the cheer captain strode up.

The spectators were as a rule not allowed on the ice. Indeed, there was a contest effort being made by a number of boys appointed by the committee in charge, looking to inducing many of the skaters to get up on the bank, where they could have a better view of the game.

"I've heard it said the ice isn't as firm as it might be, for such a crowd to gather on it," observed Minnie Cuthbert, as she and Helen sat down to remove their skates.

"Oh! dear, I hope nothing like an accident happens to-day," exclaimed Frank's sister. "Think how terrible it would be if the ice did gave way,

and throw ever so many into the river. The Harrapin has a terrible current in some places."

"I wouldn't think of such a thing," observed her chum, hastily. "To tell the truth between you and me, Helen, I think the real object is to get as clear a space as possible for the players. They're sometimes hampered by the crowd pressing around them too closely. Frank told me that himself."

"Isn't it too bad Paul Bird can't play in his old place?" Helen continued, as though her sudden fears had been allayed.

"Yes, and I've heard that he takes it very hard," Minnie remarked. "Paul is one of the best players on the hockey team. Frank says they're going to miss him terribly."

"Yes, and Hazen takes his place," added Helen. "Dock Hazen can play splendidly, Frank says, when he takes a notion; but he isn't dependable. You never know what he is going to do. One time he makes the Columbia crowd just crazy with joy; and then the very next minute he'll make what Frank calls a bonehead play that causes everybody to feel a sinking near the heart."

"Well, it's all in the game," Minnie resumed. "If Clifford does beat us it'll be a hard-fought battle all the way through. Look, Helen, I do believe they are coming down the river right now!"

"Yes, yes, you're right, for there are just eight

of them wearing the same kind of jerseys, the seven and one of their substitutes. And notice the way the Clifford crowd cheer until you'd think they had already won the game by the greatest score ever known."

"They are chock full of confidence this year!" remarked Bones Shadduck, who used to do good work as centre on the team, but had been forced to resign on account of an injured ankle.

His place had been ably filled, however, by a player named Rowland, so it was not anticipated there would be any particular weakness developed at that part of the line.

After the Clifford adherents had shouted themselves nearly hoarse there came a wild burst of cheers from the other side. The Columbia boys had darted in sight, flying here and there, and knocking a puck ahead of them in lazy practice.

The space needed for the game had been roped off as best the conditions allowed, and guards were also posted to keep the crowd from interfering. For some little time the opposing players darted back and forth, exchanging happy-go-lucky calls among themselves, or addressing some admirer in the throng lining both banks of the Harrapin.

The two captains were Frank Allen for Columbia, and Coots for Clifford. Hastings had held this office on the up-river team on former occasions, but

for certain reasons it had been transferred to the one who played centre. Coots also usually started the game, as he was a wizard about getting possession of the puck.

These fellows could now be seen in consultation with the referee and his assistant, as well as the two umpires, whose duties were almost wholly back of the home place, to notify the referee when the puck had properly entered the goal.

As the minutes crept on and the crowd constantly increased, the clamor grew in volume. It was thrilling, and must have fully come up to the expectations of the most sanguine, who had believed the contest would excite considerable interest in the neighborhood.

"What have they settled on, Hollingsworth?" asked Buster Billings, when the boy who had once been a resident of Clifford happened to pass close by, having come from the scene of the discussion.

"Oh! the regular thing," came the ready reply. "Game is to consist of two halves of twenty minutes each, and a ten minutes' intermission between. If there's a tie, why of course a third session will have to be started, but no danger of that happening today, let me tell you, Buster."

They all knew what his confident manner meant. Hollingshead, although living in Columbia now, and attending the local high school, had left his heart

in his old home, and would be found rooting hard for Clifford to win. After all, who could blame him? for those fellows from up the river were his old familiar cronies. It is hard on any boy to move only a few miles away from his former stamping ground.

"They say there are two new players on their team who are wonders; can you pick them out, Helen?" asked Minnie Cuthbert, as they sat on one of the boards arranged for the convenience of the spectators on the bank, and watched the scene on the ice-covered river below.

"Yes, that tall boy who seems so awkward with his long legs is Westover. Frank laughed when he told me about him, and said the best they could hope for would be he might get those spindles of his twisted, and fall down."

"And the other boy is named Standish, isn't he?"

"I met him one day a week or two ago," continued Helen; "and he's rather a nice fellow. That's Standish skating backwards now. He is a splendid skater, they say, and can do all sorts of fancy stunts."

"But that sort of thing wouldn't help him win a hockey game, I should think?" Minnie asserted, for her heart was set on seeing Frank Allen lead his fellows to victory, as she had known him to do

many a time before, and against just as heavy odds, too.

"No, I suppose not," her chum admitted; "but it shows that he's at home on the ice, and can make wonderfully quick starts, which you know means everything to a hockey player. There, I do believe the game's going to begin!"

"Every one not a player is being chased back and held fast, which I take it is a good sign!" declared Minnie. "Oh! I never felt as I do now, when a game was going to be started. Usually I'm just as full of confidence as anything; but to-day something seems as heavy as lead in me. I wouldn't like any one but you to hear me say it, Helen, but I'm awfully afraid we're going to get beaten!"

"I'm real mad with Paul's father," commented Helen. "It was mean of him to keep Paul out of the game. Now the chance we had to win is gone. If we had our regular left wing I wouldn't be so afraid."

"Cheer up, everybody!" Buster Billings was heard to call out, just as though he suspected what the shadow on the girls' faces stood for; "Columbia High is all right, and perhaps we've got a surprise up our sleeve for the other fellows. If only Hazen happens to be at his best they just can't down us."

Such cheery words had the effect of causing the two girls to exchange smiles, and then Minnie said to her chum in a low voice:

"He's right, Helen, and we have no business to feel badly. What if we do fail to-day there's another game to be fought, and the story may be a different one next Saturday."

"Yes, because by then perhaps the watch may be found," replied Helen, which remark showed how confident she was that the outlook for the home school was only dismal because of Paul's enforced absence from the game.

There was a movement among the massed spectators. Everybody wished to settle down in a place where they could witness each move made by the swiftly flying figures of the hockey players, once the signal to start business had been given.

"Frank is going to start play, I'm glad to see," someone called out.

"And Coots is opposed to him, as usual," Hollingsworth added.

All of the Columbia students knew what that meant. Of old they had watched this same Coots play a dazzling game, and it was little wonder that he had been elevated to the position of captain.

Besides, he had few equals, and certainly no superiors, in the rapidity with which he could "hook" the puck when the referee said the magic word that put every player on his mettle. Frank understood his customary tactics, and meant to give him a good square tussle for the possession of the rubber, be-

cause in hockey the side that can keep the puck moving has by long odds the better chance to make goals.

There was now a scattering of the two teams. Unlike baseball every player was on duty at all times. There could be no resting for those at bat, but back and forth they must fly at lightning speed, ever striving by hook or crook to get that bounding rubber clinched, and carried to the enemy's goal, despite the efforts of the defenders to avoid such a catastrophe.

The referee thought it his duty to say a few words before announcing play.

"We expect to enforce the customary rules here to-day," he told the players who were all within easy hearing of his clear voice. "No more roughness than is absolutely necessary will be tolerated. I have examined all the skates worn by contestants, and they come within the rules. Off-side play will be penalized, and let it be clearly understood that in case a player is ruled off he will under no conditions be allowed to return to the game. In that case a substitute must take his place. That is all I wish to say. Get ready, everybody!"

There was a tightening of hands on hockey sticks, a bending of lithe bodies, and every fellow took in a big breath of anticipation.

"Play!" came from the lips of the referee.

CHAPTER VI

THE BITTERNESS OF DEFEAT

"THEY'RE off!" almost screamed an excited boy.

"And Coots didn't get in his usual trick of getting the puck at the start, did he?" whooped a second fellow, who was evidently also a Columbia student, and had the interests of the local team close to his heart.

Every eye was glued upon the fast moving figures of the players as they flew back and forth. The ring of their steel runners on the ice could be plainly heard at times, though sudden burst of cheering, as some clever trick was pulled off by an individual player, drowned other sounds.

Frank managed to carry the rubber along with him some little distance toward the enemy's goal before it was snatched away by one of the recruits. He soon saw that these fellows were clever hands, and not to be scorned as opponents.

Lanky Wallace as rover brought the puck back to the side of Columbia when it had been dribbled dangerously close to their goal. The tall fellow had apparently not lost any of his former cunning, and

his work was greeted with vociferous yells from his many admirers.

One pretty girl at least seemed to be greatly delighted with watching him rush ahead of all the other players, glancing over his shoulder occasionally as he flew. She was clapping her hands constantly as long as Lanky held the puck.

This was Dora Baxter, who lived more than ten miles up the river, where her folks had a farm. Lanky had first met her on an occasion never to be forgotten, and an account of which can be found fully narrated in a previous book of this series.*

When the fourteen contestants had first faced each other on the two sides of the line, it was in the following order:

Clifford.		*Columbia.*
McQuirk.	*Goal.*	Langworthy.
Hastings.	*Point.*	Rowland.
Standish.	*Cover Point.*	Comfort.
Coots.	*Center.*	Allen.
Adkins.	*Rover.*	Wallace.
Westover.	*Left Wing.*	Hazen.
Wentworth.	*Right Wing.*	Shay.

By now some fifteen minutes of the first half had been consumed, and thus far not a single goal had

* See "The Boys of Columbia High on the Ice."

been scored. Three times the Clifford players had rounded the puck for a last decisive cast; but on every occasion the splendid defensive work of Columbia had prevented a score.

Langworthy at goal was an ideal defender. His eye was quick, and that stick of his seemed to get about everything it went after. The spectators fairly held their breath when Adkins tried for the fourth time to send the rubber spinning past goal and into the net.

"Steady, Ralph!" cried many of the eager Columbia students on the bank, as Langworthy stood like a bulwark ready to hurl back the foe.

With the sound of the blow the puck shot straight toward the goal. It was hurled with such tremendous speed that it actually left the ice; so that although Ralph struck cleverly at it, the shape of his hockey stick, being so unlike a baseball bat, was against him.

A groan arose from those who saw what had happened. It was instantly followed by wild bursts of cheering from the Clifford adherents in which many of the local rooters felt compelled to join, for it had been a magnificent play on the part of Adkins.

"They're too much for your side, seems like!" a boy from up-river jeered, shaking his head as though he felt sorry for the poor Columbia High players.

"Wait!" he was told by an undaunted rooter, "the fellow who laughs last laughs best, they say. Even this period isn't over yet, and another one to come."

"That's so," rejoined the visitor, with a happy laugh. "Twenty minutes for one goal; but now we've found the way, we can do heaps better than that. Watch how we walk all over your crowd."

Five minutes later his prophecy seemed about to be fulfilled. Another goal had been shot by the dexterous Clifford players. They were apparently getting in the habit.

"It's like taking candy from a baby!" yelled one boy, while the school colors of Clifford were waved on high, and the purple and gold of Columbia could hardly be seen anywhere.

Frank knew that this second goal would never have been secured by the enemy except for a bad break on the part of Hazen, who failed to accomplish a brilliant task he had set himself, hoping to merit the applause of the crowd.

It so happened that immediately after play was resumed conditions again developed whereby this identical play fell to his lot again. The crowd held its breath.

Clifford hoped and Columbia feared that history would repeat itself again. But that was just what it did not do. This time luck seemed to be in

Hazen's favor, or else he paid more attention to his business, and less to watching the crowd; for he certainly executed a dazzling play, snatched the rubber away from Westover, carried it with him down the ice, dodging to the right and to the left, and then with a mighty crash sending it squarely into the Clifford net, just before the whistle of the referee announced that the first inning was over.

The score was now two to one, and hope began to once more rise in the hearts of those who belonged to Columbia High. If only Hazen would keep on like that all might yet be well. Many believed he was capable of duplicating his remarkable performance; but Frank knew only too well how unreliable a player he was.

Still Frank spent most of the intermission talking to his men, and encouraging them by every means in his power.

They again faced their opponents. This time Frank had sent Lanky Wallace in to open the inning, while Hastings was opposed to him, Coots resting temporarily.

The game was in full swing the second the referee gave the word. Lanky proved too rapid for the former captain of the Clifford seven. He snatched the puck away, despite the efforts of Hastings to capture it with the shoe of his hockey stick.

Again there was a confused medley of colored

jerseys seen closing in, and with swinging sticks trying to get possession of the coveted trophy. The shrill whistle of the referee could be heard again and again, as he stopped play for a moment to reprimand some eager participant who had blundered, and accordingly had to be penalized.

In the excitement blows often fell where they gave more or less pain. If in the estimation of the referee this had been done purposely it might result in the guilty player being eliminated from the game, and none of them wanted such a thing to happen.

Frank covered himself with glory, and several times passed the puck to Hazen, who was expected to push it on, and get a chance to shoot for goal. Alas! Hazen did not seem to be the same wizard he had appeared toward the close of the first inning. He fumbled, and lost the rubber.

Even the girls on the river bank noted the error, and the remarks of some of the thoroughly disgusted Columbia High boys nearby would have enlightened them had they rested in ignorance.

"Oh! if Paul had only been there!" cried Minnie, and there could not be the least doubt that Frank's sister echoed that exclamation in her heart.

"There, they've got it started for our goal again," said Bones Shadduck, as the players surged toward the Columbia end of the marked-off space, amid great shouts and encouraging cheers.

"Clifford certainly knows how to make a racket when she wants!" complained Buster Billings, placing both hands over his ears; partly no doubt because they were hostile cheers he was listening to, and not from local rooters.

"A goal!" shrieked someone.

It was only too true. Clifford had shot the puck home for the third time. With just ten more minutes of play, it seemed almost out of the question that Columbia could tie the score, and necessitate another inning.

"They don't know what it is to give up, boys!" cried Bones Shadduck, who doubtless was fairly eating his honest heart out because cruel fortune had deprived him from being on the team this winter.

His substitute was doing very well, all things considered; but then Bones knew he could have played his old position of point better, though he was far too modest to say so himself.

"Go at 'em fellows, and eat 'em up!" Frank told his six panting companions as he and Coots again faced each other.

It was one of the snappiest fights ever seen on the Harrapin as far back as hockey had been played there.

In just four minutes after play had been resumed Frank himself carried the puck past all opposition, and shot it home amidst a tornado of shrieks and

whistles, above which could be heard the local glee club, assisted by dozens of other rooters, giving the school yell:

"Ho! ho! ho! hi! hi! hi! veni, vidi, vici—Columbia!"

Six more minutes were all that remained. Could they manage to shoot another goal in such a brief period of time? Of course Clifford would fight like tigers to prevent their scoring, since victory was already within their grasp.

Again Frank took the puck away from Coots. Indeed, it was seldom Clifford had scored in this particular, though their new men had proved their worth time and again.

Fast and furious grew the fighting, and the whistle and piercing voice of the referee seemed to be in evidence pretty much all the time. The young athletes were like tigers, each grimly bent on accomplishing marvelous feats. Clifford put forth all her energies into tryng to balk the enemy. There was no particular need of endeavoring to score, as her side was already in the lead.

To delay the game, and keep the puck as near the middle of the field as possible, was the scheme they had arranged. The precious seconds were passing. One of the Clifford players made so bad a break that in spite of the near approach of the time limit the

referee felt compelled to call the game, and have a substitute put in action.

That brought a fresh player to the front, something that has often won a game on hotly contested fields. Perhaps it may have been deliberately planned by Clifford, though in times past they had always been deemed the soul of honor in all matters connected with sport.

No matter. Frank was there to make a tie of it, and get that extra inning played, if it could be managed.

He now had possession of the puck again, but was compelled to shoot it over to another player. He felt a cold chill when it turned out to be Hazen. The Columbia left wing started off as though about to duplicate his former dazzling play. He had almost the whole field trailing after him. Ahead the keeper of the goal waited to prevent a shot into the net.

Hazen had his chance. He looked up just for one second, as though crazy to see that great crowd watching his play. Then he made his final stroke, and they could see the puck spinning forward.

McQuirk struck at it, but failed to connect. Shouts broke forth, but all the joy for Columbia was spilled when the word went forth that the puck had missed the goal after all. And before it could

be faced again the whistle of the referee announced that the game was over.

Pandemonium followed, Clifford naturally being wild with joy over the great victory over her old-time enemy down the river, whose valiant teams had so often been successful in trailing her banner in the dust of bitter defeat.

But one of the first things the captain of the Clifford team did was to call for three cheers for the beaten team; which were given with a heartiness that did much to mitigate the sting defeat always brings in its train.

CHAPTER VII

SKATING UP THE HARRAPIN

"WELL, it's all over, even the shouting, Lanky!" said Frank, as he met the tall rover skating along with the pretty girl with the black eyes, Dora Baxter.

"And we got beautifully beaten in the bargain, didn't we?" grumbled the other. "I expected it was going to drop on us, especially after I saw Hazen make that bonehead play in the first inning."

"But the next time he had a chance he did a good piece of work," returned Frank, though he knew very well that the burden of defeat must rest at the door of the substitute left wing who had been put in Paul Bird's place.

"Yes, it was a rattling good play," admitted Lanky, frankly. If he could be depended on to do that kind of stuff two out of three times there'd be not a word against him. But he broke me all up at the end, when he missed the goal that would have tied us."

"I feel about as bad as you do, Lanky," Frank

told him, "but I'm not going to let myself believe Clifford will win next time."

"Huh, if we could only get Paul back in line we'd stand some show, Frank. But see here, don't you feel like joining us for a good old-time run up the river, like we used to enjoy?"

"It would take me away from all this chatter and noise, for a fact," Frank admitted, "and do me a world of good. I don't care if I do. And I reckon that means a twenty-five mile skate."

"Well, you see Dora has been staying with a friend here in town just to see the game to-day, and her folks expect her back before night. So I promised I'd take her home. We planned to take the rig, but the ice is so fine that it tempted us to go home that way."

"Wait a bit, Lanky; you're not in a dreadful hurry, I hope?" said Frank.

"Oh! I understand," commented Lanky, with a knowing look. "Minnie is right over there. Coax her to skate up river with us. Her mother is on the bank, and Minnie could get permission to go anywhere with you. And with a young moon to light us, we can come home on skates. It'll be a dandy run, believe me."

Frank hurried away, and was soon talking with Minnie Cuthbert. She waved her hand toward the spot where Lanky stood with Dora.

"It strikes her as a bully good idea, too, you see, Dora," the tall boy declared, as they saw Minnie and Frank hasten to where Mrs. Cuthbert was talking with a bevy of friends. "And between them they're sure to get a 'yes' from mamma."

A few minutes later the others joined Lanky and Dora. It did not require more than one glance at the excited and pleased face of Minnie to tell the result of their appeal.

"I think it's just the finest plan any one could have arranged," said the red-cheeked girl whom Frank Allen favored above all those he knew; "and to think how romantic it will seem skating down the Harrapin by moonlight. I hope they don't have any ferocious wolves around up your way, Dora? I've read about how they attack bold skaters after nightfall in winter time."

At that the country girl laughed merrily.

"All the wolves up our way walk on two feet," she told Minnie. "In fact, I don't believe a real wolf has been seen for twenty years or more. I only wish I was coming back again with you. I never seem to get enough of skating."

So they started off, leaving the crowds still talking the late contest over, and trying to figure out just how Clifford came to win.

The town which was going to have bonfires that night, on account of the victory, lay three miles up

the river, and on the other shore. All the way up they overtook detachments of those who had come down to see the game, and were now on their way home.

Frank and Lanky were well known, for they had faced the best athletes of Clifford many times in the past. Of course considerable good-natured badinage was shouted after them, to which they returned suitable replies, so that the boys of the rival town might not get it into their heads Columbia could not taste defeat in the proper sort of spirit.

There were any number of places along the upper stretches of the river which reminded Frank and his chum of events occurring in the past. As they skated along in a bunch, Frank and Minnie holding crossed hands, and the other pair doing the same, some of these happenings were mentioned to the girls.

Presently they reached Clifford.

"That ends the crowds on the river!" said Lanky. "You can't seem to see a single skater above the town, I'm glad to say."

"I should think there wouldn't be," laughed Frank, "with all that mob down to watch their team wipe up the ice with poor Columbia. Why, I believe every person who owned any kind of skates in Clifford was on hand. And they hit it right, too."

"See the kids rolling empty tar barrels along,

will you!" exclaimed Lanky with a grimace. "They mean to have a celebration to-night."

"Just as we would have done had the boot been on the other leg," Frank told him. "But I'm glad the game was a fair and square one, though I was a little suspicious about the way Wentworth had himself put out, so as to allow a fresh sub. to take his place, just when the rest of us were winded, and nearly stale."

They skated on, and soon had turned a bend, so that the last house in Clifford had been blotted out of sight. Solitude reigned around them, for up above the rival town there were only occasional farms, perhaps a lumber camp or two, and then still more isolated farms like that of the Baxters'.

"This is just what I love to do—get away from the crowd, and where you seem to own the whole universe," Minnie declared.

"So long as I'm not included in the crowd I'm offering no objection," Frank hastened to say, with a laugh; "and to tell the truth it happens to be my own sentiments every time. Give me a good companion, like Lanky here, and I can enjoy myself a great deal better than mixing with a hundred skaters, and dodging fellows like Buster Billings, who bear down on you like a windmill under full sail, or a tenement house broken loose."

More miles were placed behind them. The river

narrowed so that in places the banks did not seem to be more than twenty yards apart. Then again they would come to a wide basin where it looked like a lake.

Everywhere the ice seemed to be in capital shape. Lanky vowed he had no idea it was half so fine.

"I'll get busy and put the finishing touches to that new iceboat of mine, let me tell you; and early in the week, Frank, if only it doesn't snow hard in the meantime, consider that you're invited to join me in a trial spin."

"Nothing would please me better," he was told. "Look out ahead, there's an airhole waiting to trap us. Do you know it seems to me you can tell sometimes where these blowholes are from the way the runners sound on the ice."

"But what do these bad spots come from, do you know, Frank?" asked Minnie.

"I may be mistaken," she was told, "but my impression is most of the holes you always find in frozen ponds, and even rivers are caused by springs that happen to bubble up just there. You see the water, though cold in summer, is so much warmer in winter than the rest, that it keeps an opening above the place."

"Now, I never thought of that, Frank," said Lanky, "but, it sounds reasonable enough, and I wouldn't be surprised if you're right."

Chatting and enjoying themselves they finally covered the twelve or more miles that lay between the Baxter farm and Columbia.

"Here's the same place we took off our skates that time we came up here, and helped put out a fire at the Baxter farmhouse. Remember that, don't you, Lanky?" quizzed Frank.

"Do I?" echoed the other, with a grin; "Why, that was the time I met Dora, wasn't it? And we had something to do with bringing her brother Willie back home. He's made good since then, and the farm never gave such a profit I wager as this last summer."

They had a little tramp before arriving at the Baxter farmhouse. Here they received a warm reception from all the good people; for no boys were quite such welcome guests there as Lanky Wallace and Frank Allen. And any one who is curious to learn just why this should be so is referred back to a previous volume for the particulars.*

The balance of the afternoon quickly sped away, and then they gathered around the hospitable table, which fairly groaned with all the good things known to the housewife of a prosperous farm.

"Oh! I'm ever so glad I came," Minnie told Frank several times, as with dancing eyes she en-

* See "The Boys of Columbia High on the Ice."

tered into the lively conversation that went around the supper table.

They talked of the times gone by, and how they had first met the two lads. Minnie may have heard some sort of an account concerning that adventure; but now she learned just how heroically the Columbia High chums who had been on that little trip had carried themselves; for Mr. Baxter, his good wife, and the stalwart son had stories to tell that caused the girl to glance shyly at Frank several times, and even with traces of tears in her eyes.

Later on they sat in the living room and chatted still more, as well as sang a great many of their school songs to please the old people.

In the course of the conversation Dora was impelled to relate what Minnie had said about her fear of meeting wolves up in their part of the country. Of course both Mr. Baxter and his grown son laughed heartily at the idea.

"Yes, it's surely been at least twenty-five years or more since they killed a wolf around here," the farmer told them; "and even then it must have strayed down from the north. Of course this is a new farm for us, but we've lived within thirty mile of here all our lives."

"Yes," said Lanky, "I remember when Dora was just knee high to a duck, and she fell in a pool of dirty water when I happened to be passing by.

I helped her, though it wasn't deep enough to hurt. We found this out only a little while ago, for I never really knew her till the fire up here."

"But speaking of wolves," continued Mr. Baxter, "while we haven't any around in these days, we have something that's playing hob with our lambs, and even sheep."

"Not a bear, or a panther?" questioned Lanky, looking interested; while Minnie turned a little pale.

"Not quite so bad as either," replied Mr. Baxter; "but it appears that some sort of fierce dog has gone back to the wild state, and coaxed a whole lot of others to track along with him. They make a pack of, some say, half-a-dozen, and the most moderate declare there are four of the beasts roaming around."

"Domestic dogs back to the wild state; what do you mean by that, sir?" asked Minnie, who had never heard of such a strange thing.

Frank knew all about it.

"Dogs are related to the family of wolves. Canine and lupine, dog and wolf, are first cousins," he explained. "There's something in a great many dogs that seems to draw them back to the chase. They go wild when on the track of game, because ages ago before mankind took to feeding them as pets they had to exist that way. And this old trait crops out once in a while. The fierce yelp of dogs

on the trail is that spirit showing itself. Am I right, Mr. Baxter?"

"To the letter, Frank, and since you've explained it so cleverly any further words from me would be wasted. These dogs have given us considerable trouble."

The two boys thought little more about the matter. If it preyed upon the mind of Minnie, at least she failed to mention the fact; though once or twice Frank, who knew her moods so well, fancied she had become singularly quiet. Perhaps he could give a guess as to the reason, too.

Finally it was decided that the time had come to start home. Minnie had promised not to stay too late; and besides they would have the night wind against them on their way back, at least most of the distance.

The good-byes were said. Dora and her brother even came down to the brink of the river to see them off, since it was such a delightful moonlight night.

So far up as this Harrapin was not much of a stream. Still, as has been mentioned before, there were places where it widened considerably.

How fine it was, gliding onward, with a steady hand holding each of her arms. Minnie did not see that she had any cause for uneasiness just then. Her merry voice often rang out with laugh or jest as they sped swiftly along.

When, after turning an abrupt bend, they found that they had to go against the breeze it was not quite so nice, though all of them were young and hearty, and prepared for the cold.

The steel runners cutting into the ice gave out that never-to-be-forgotten ringing sound that is unlike anything else known. On either side they could see the snow-covered bank, and the darker trees outlined in the misty light of the moon.

Few there who would not enjoy such a glorious skate. Minnie certainly was having a splendid time, and would be sorry when they passed Clifford, for then home must lie only a few miles further on.

Perhaps they had made as much as one-fifth of the distance when they found themselves with one of the wider stretches just before them. Here the wind had an open path, and it was still more difficult to make fast time.

"Bend as low as you can, Minnie, and it'll be easier for you!" said Frank, as they came full into this open stretch, and at least a mile lay ahead of them before they could expect relief.

Minnie had no chance to make any reply, for at that moment there came a series of quick yelps from the shore close by. Looking in that direction the skaters were thrilled to see a number of swiftly moving objects dashing out on the ice, and heading straight for them.

CHAPTER VIII

CHASED BY THE WILD DOG PACK

"Oh! Frank, the wild dogs are after us!" cried Minnie, in terror.

"Skate faster!" was all Frank replied, though there was a grimness about the manner in which he swung his stout hockey stick in his disengaged hand that spoke volumes.

"Wow! what do you think of that, now?" exclaimed Lanky Wallace.

The two boys were at first more or less mystified to understand just why the dogs, wild or not, should chase after them; although Lanky quickly gave a guess that the fine turkey he had fastened to his back, and which was a present from the farmer to his folks, might explain it.

Glancing back over his shoulder as he skated Frank saw that there could be no doubt about it. The pack had not simply been about to cross the river at the time of their chancing to pass.

"Are they chasing us, Frank?" asked Minnie, fearfully, not daring to try to see for herself.

Indeed there was no need of any answer from Frank, for hardly had the words left her lips than a most unearthly clamor broke out, that sent the blood from her heart.

First there came a deep-throated bay, as though that might be the signal from the accepted leader of the pack, other dogs joined in with excited yaps until the chorus was in full blast.

The pack was madly chasing after them. Perhaps their keen noses had gotten scent of that turkey, which had been killed late in the afternoon. Hunger would be a sufficient cause for the wild dogs to attack human beings, though as a rule they fought shy of mankind in their new mode of living.

Lanky, after guessing what might be drawing them along, had a flitting notion to cast his burden loose, thinking that if he did the dogs would lose all desire to pursue them further.

"I'll be hanged if I will!" he immediately muttered to himself.

Several things actuated him in his new resolution. In the first place he could not very well get at the cords which fastened the heavy turkey to his back, for Dora's brother had made a thorough job of it. Then again Lanky was not one of the yielding kind. The only reason, possibly, why he had thought of trying to tempt the pack to give up the pursuit was on account of Minnie Cuthbert.

Having thus decided to stick it out Lanky in his turn twisted his long neck around and looked back over his left shoulder.

There was no difficulty whatever in seeing the pack coming. In advance a large aggressive dog leaped along. This must be the animal Mr. Baxter had been telling them about, the beast that had somehow yielded to the old wild strain, and deserting the haunts of man had gone back to a state of nature, hunting for his food as might the most savage wolf.

The others had been "tolled" off to join him by some canine plea, and they seemed perfectly satisfied to share his privations and triumphs. Many a lamb had been missed during the last two months. Mr. Baxter said the dogs were growing bolder, and invading sheepfolds. Even calves and pigs had vanished, with little to mark their fate save possibly the trampled ground, the prints of many dog paws, and in most cases signs of blood.

Lanky in that one glance counted them.

"Gee whiz! five of the critters, as sure as you're born, Frank!" he called out, thinking his chum ought to know, even though passing the information along might give Minnie another chill.

"Oh! what can we do, Frank?" she asked, in a voice that trembled.

Frank was filled with alarm. He knew the girl

must be badly frightened, even though she skated her best, and seemed endeavoring to be brave.

"Don't be afraid, Minnie," he told her, as he pressed her arm in a way meant to be reassuring; "Lanky and myself can manage them, if it comes to the worst. We've got our heavy hockey sticks here, you remember."

"Yes, but five of them, Frank!" she remonstrated.

"Only one counts for much," he told her.

"Guess you're right, Frank, and he's the leader of the pack!" said Lanky.

"If we have to turn and fight," Frank pursued, steadily, "everybody shout as loud as you can, remember."

"What for, Frank?" asked Minnie.

"The more noise we can make," he quickly told her, "the better chance to scare the smaller dogs off. They used to be afraid of people, perhaps, and the old fear may take hold."

"But that big brute won't scare at anything, Frank!" Lanky declared, "so we've got to keep hammering away at him the best way we know how. If we could only knock him on the head it'd be the finest thing ever for the farmers up this way."

"We'll try our best, Lanky!"

"Yes, we've done as much before now, and can again," the tall boy hastened to say, for he knew

Minnie was hanging on their words with intense eagerness.

While they exchanged these few sentences they were skating with might and main against the harrassing night wind. How unfortunate that it had to strike them in the face just at that time! Had they been going up the river they could have left the scrambling pack far in the rear.

The dogs' sharp claws enabled them to gain a certain amount of impetus, once the chase was under full swing. They kept up an awe-inspiring racket as they sped along; and whoever has heard the yapping of a number of dogs, hot on the scent of game, can understand to what Frank and his two companions were listening.

Quickly following the last remark on Lanky's part Frank took another observation.

"They are surely gaining on us, Lanky!" he said; because Minnie must know the truth, since no good would follow trying to hide it from her.

"You give the orders, Frank, remember!" urged the tall chum, knowing the value of working in unison if it came to a fight.

"Then listen," said Frank, always quick to form his plan of action, "we'll head along closer to the left bank of the river. That gives us a wide sweep across when we turn sharply."

"Turn?" exclaimed Lanky, wonderingly.

"When they're close at our heels," continued Frank, "we'll suddenly swerve to the right. We can do that on our skates, but the dogs will slide along the smooth ice some little way before they can pull up. Don't you see?"

"Yes, yes, I'm on to the game, Frank!" cried the other, eagerly. "That's going to make it hard for them to get started fresh again, and'll give us a chance to pull ahead some! It's a good scheme. Cheer up, Minnie. Some day you'll laugh at this little affair."

Poor Minnie did not think so. She feared she could never picture that terrible flight, with the wild-dog pack at their heels, without a shudder. And moonlight would lose some of its charm in her eyes because it would revive disquieting memories.

They had by this time managed to cover almost three-fourths of the wide stretch of the river. Frank knew that if they expected to try out that plan of his it must be very speedily. Once they entered the narrow part of the ice-bound river the chances of making it a success would be considerably lessened.

He swept a quick look around him again, wishing to make sure of everything before starting operations. If after all, for any cause which he could not foresee, the scheme proved a failure, then he and that sturdy comrade of his must depend entirely upon the manner in which they could swing

those hockey sticks and bring them down upon the head of that leading dog.

It was far from an agreeable sight that met his eyes when he looked back. The leader of the pack, the beast declared responsible for this reign of alarm through the farming district, was so close on their heels that Frank could easily see his glaring eyes. In the bright moonlight he even made out the gleaming white fangs, and the tongue that protruded from his red jaws.

Surely never had a savage wolf looked more formidable than that wild dog did. It was hard to believe he had been a family pet, and that perhaps before yielding, even children may have fondled him.

Half a minute more, Frank knew they must attempt the maneuver he had planned as a desperate method of putting more distance between the eager pursuers and themselves. After that he did not mean to look back again, but devote all his energies to the task in hand.

"When I give the word, Minnie, swing sharply to the right," he said, distinctly. "Do you get me there?"

"Yes, I understand, Frank!" she answered, striving to be brave, and show him she could be of assistance rather than a mere drag upon his movements.

CHAPTER IX

THE BATTLE ON THE ICE

"SWING!" Frank suddenly called.

All three instantly bore to the right, and were shooting across the river. No sooner had this movement been successfully negotiated than Lanky must satisfy his curiosity by taking another observation.

What he saw evidently gave him satisfaction, for he could be heard laughing—rather hysterically, to be sure.

"They're trying to throw out their anchors to windward, Frank, but keep slipping over the smooth ice like everything! One even rolled, but he's up again now. There, they've got a fresh start after us."

"But we must have gained considerable, didn't we?" asked Minnie anxiously, as she exerted herself to skate swiftly.

"Yes, all that could be expected!" replied Lanky.

"And we're doing much better, now that we haven't the wind in our faces!" Frank added, desirous of cheering her drooping spirits.

"But there's the shore ahead of us, and we must change again right away!" Lanky warned them.

"The pack couldn't have gained any since making that fresh start," said Frank; "for they must have had a job getting going. Now we'll swing again, this time to the left."

It was his turn to bear around, Lanky being the pivot on which the action was based. Minnie seized the opportunity to take a hurried look, for she could now see without more than half turning her head. The wild dog pack was strung out, with the big leader at the head, already striving to alter their course, but slipping on the glassy surface of the ice-bound river.

A minute later the chase was again down-stream. They once more met the wind, and felt that it checked their progress more than they liked.

The maneuver had been fairly successful, but Frank knew there could be little chance of repeating it, since the narrowness of the river prevented.

As a last resort there would remain their hockey clubs, with which he believed he and Lanky could give a good account of themselves, much to the discomfiture of that gaunt, dun-colored beast.

"Oh! Frank!" cried Minnie suddenly.

"What's the matter now?" he asked.

"I'm afraid we're going to meet more of them!" she continued.

"The dickens you say!" ejaculated Lanky.

"Whereabouts, Minnie?"

"Look ahead there!" she told them.

"I heard a dog bark in front, Frank!" cried Lanky.

"But that isn't a dog whistling, is it?" demanded the other boy.

"Frank, I do believe it's some fellow skating along with the wind!" almost shouted Lanky, thrilled by the possibility of their receiving reinforcements when they were so badly needed.

"He's got a dog, too, and a big one in the bargain!" Frank announced; for as the two parties were swiftly approaching one another it now became much easier to distinguish things, even in the deceptive moonlight.

"I guess I know," burst out Lanky Wallace; "Dora introduced me to a strapping young farmer down at the river bank just before the game. His name is Hank Gowdy, and I noticed he had a fine dog at his heels. That must be Hank. Hurrah! now we'll see some fur fly."

Frank looked back.

"The pack is at our heels again, and still coming on!" he announced.

"But here's Hank Gowdy and his dog!" cried Lanky, full of excitement; then raising his voice he

shrieked: "Hello! Hank, help us, won't you? The wild dogs are after us!"

"That's me!" they heard the young farmer answer, as he swung a heavy club he happened to be carrying, for parts of the river were lonely at this hour of the night.

"Pull up, to the right here, Lanky—Minnie!" suddenly called Frank.

They managed to swing out of the direct path of the pursuing pack, which was a master stroke on the part of Frank. The dog with Hank Gowdy had not a particle of fear in his make-up, to judge from the vigorous onset he made upon the leader of the pack.

"Go for him, Major! sick him, boy!" shouted Hank, as the two animals came in collision, and there ensued a series of savage snarls, and gurgling sounds.

There was immediate work for everybody, since the balance of the pack came up with a rush just then.

"Yah! take that, you!" shouted Lanky, as he smashed the heavy bow of his well-tested hockey stick against the head of a white dog that had manifested a desire to come into close contact.

The blow was so well driven that he knocked the animal over. It managed to scramble to its feet again, in some manner; but apparently that blow

must have brought back former respect for human adversaries. At any rate the white dog took to his heels, yelping furiously in a different key, and nothing further was to be feared from that quarter.

Meanwhile Frank and the farmer were striking with might and main at the other animals, and from the yelps of pain that arose on the night air it would appear that their blows were not all lost.

It took them but a brief time to scatter the pack. The craven flight of the white dog may have had something to do with this, as well as their former fear of humankind. Then again their undaunted leader was having the time of his life in a desperate fight with Major, now one being on top, and then the other. This would add to the alarm of the other four-footed vagabonds, Frank expected.

With the flight of the last member of the pack except the ferocious leader, the coast seemed clear. The three boys gathered around the struggling animals, ready to get in a stroke to favor Major, if it could be accomplished without too much risk to Hank's pet.

Despite his valor, Major was hardly a fit antagonist for the other beast, and it might have gone hard with him in the end only for the deft way in which Lanky managed to get in a quick stroke.

The heavy bow of the club fell full upon the head of the pack leader. No doubt it stunned him

somewhat, for Major took advantage of the opportunity to secure a fresh grip on his throat.

Minnie had watched the fight thus far, but shuddering she now turned her head away, unable to witness the death of the game if misguided pack leader. She heard excited shouts from the three boys, and the sound of blows. Then came the pæan of victory from the excited but delighted Lanky.

"That crack I gave settled him, I tell you all! He's gone up for good this time. No more of those fine young lambs for him! Bully for us, Frank—Hank! Hurrah!

Frank was shaking the hard hand of the young farmer.

"Glad to know you, Hank Gowdy," he said, enthusiastically. "You couldn't have met us at a better time. We managed to dodge the pack where the river was wide, but the same side slant trick couldn't be played again, and we'd have had to face around, no matter what happened."

"A friend in need is a friend indeed!" said Minnie, now recovering from her attack of shivering, as she saw that everything was all right.

"Glad to meet with you again, Lanky Wallace," said the young farmer, as he returned the squeeze the tall boy gave his hand, and really made Lanky wince; after which he called Major away from the motionless beast, and stepped over to ascertain for himself the true state of affairs.

"No more trouble to be feared from him, is there?" asked Frank.

"As dead as a doornail," came the reassuring reply, at which Lanky laughed aloud, and patted his hockey stick.

"If it didn't help win a victory against Clifford to-day," he remarked in a satisfied way, "I've got no kick coming about that club. It's the best I ever swung, barring none."

"I saw the game," said Hank, "and it sure was a rattler. I kind of felt for Clifford, because you Columbia fellers have put it over them so often in baseball and football. But you stuck to it, mighty strong, and if only that Hazen boy could have made his goal it'd have tied the score."

"Oh! well, what's the use kicking," said Lanky, carelessly. "We play the game in Columbia for the fun that's in it; and if we get up against a better team we take our beating with a grin. Better luck next time for our seven. Only we do hope we can have Paul Bird back in line, instead of Hazen. How do you happen to be on your way home so late, Hank?"

"What, me?" echoed the other; "why, an old friend of mine made me go home with him to supper, and we sat there jawing a while afterwards. But I knowed the skating would be fine all the way up, and I had Major along to keep me company."

"Which was a lucky thing for us, Hank!" asserted Lanky, patting the big dog on the head, as the latter licked the wounds received in the savage fight.

"The young lady must a been pretty bad scared," suggested Hank, as an invitation for an introduction, which Frank immediately gave.

"Yes," admitted Minnie, drawing a long breath, "I'll be honest, and confess that it wasn't very pleasant. I'm afraid I'll be a coward after this when it comes to taking moonlight skates on the river. I'll be seeing wild dogs in every shadow along the shore."

"Don't you believe it!" declared Lanky; "with the death of that beast the pack will break up, and those other dogs sneak back home where they belong. They must have been coaxed away somehow by that fellow. And besides, Minnie, I guess you needn't be afraid while Frank is along."

Of course at that Frank whistled, and Hank said, "Oh! my!" while Minnie placed her hand on Frank's arm as she said bravely:

"Yes, I ought to be ashamed to say that, after the way you boys have carried me along, and stood by me. I think I would have died of fright if I'd been alone. But I'm glad it's all over, and that we can now go the rest of the way in peace."

"You'll not hear a cur bark," said Hank, "'less it's some farm dog tied up, an' bayin' the moon.

The folks up my way will be glad about this job. I'm going to lug the captain of the pack along with me. I know the rascal well; for he used to belong to a neighbor, Sile Jonas."

They saw him seize upon a hind leg of the dead dog, and start off, with Major running behind, to occasionally sniff at his defunct enemy, as though still a little suspicious concerning his being out of the game forever.

"We'd better be off ourselves, I take it," Frank suggested; and as there was no objection from Minnie or his chum, they started away for the distant home town.

To the boys the adventure had not been wholly unpleasant, for they dearly loved the thrill such a happening sent through them. Besides, they were accustomed to depending on themselves in sudden emergencies, and could feel a certain satisfaction in having successfully met the attack of the wild-dog pack.

With Minnie Cuthbert it was a different matter, and she concluded not to say a word as yet to her folks, for fear of causing her mother anxiety, and possibly curtailing her own future pleasures. But in time, of course, the truth was bound to be public property, since someone from up-river way would tell how Frank and Lanky managed to assist Hank Gowdy's Major in disposing of the wild-dog leader.

CHAPTER X

LANKY BRINGS IMPORTANT NEWS

On the following Monday after school there was a constant stream of boys and girls headed for the river. It had been passed around that some of the fellows who could not make the hockey team had gotten up a skating race, with a prize for the winner.

It was open to all, though of course some sort of discretion would have to be used in order not to have promising participants crowded out by others who had no chance.

The weather still remained cold and clear. It was in fact one of the finest stretches of good skating weather ever known in that section of country, at least by any boy.

Frank Allen had decided not to enter in the race, but Lanky Wallace was of a different mind. He knew there were several fellows who believed they could skate swifter than he had ever done in the past. As Lanky had for three seasons enjoyed the enviable reputation of being the champion long-distance skater of Columbia High, and of the

neighboring towns as well, he could not stand idly by and hear of his laurels being taken away, without lifting a hand to retain them.

While there was not anything like the crowd present as witnessed the hockey match, some hundreds of young people had gathered when the skaters were summoned to toe the line.

Paul Bird had shown up on the ice, but apparently found little heart in the sport of which he was usually very fond, for he soon vanished. Frank had not found a good chance to talk with Paul, but as he looked after him climbing the bank he could easily tell from the dejected manner of the other that nothing new or favorable had developed as yet.

"Poor Paul!" Frank said to himself, as he shook his head. "I wish I could think up some way to help him. He's been scouting all around the country trying to find out who that stranger could be, and it seems that nobody knows. It's mighty mysterious, I think. And I'm afraid he'll never get on the track of the lost watch."

Frank just then made a discovery that for the moment caused him to forget all about Paul's troubles.

The long line of contestants for the skating prize was beginning to form. Most of the competitors were lithe looking chaps, with trim limbs, and undoubtedly a chance of developing remarkable speed.

One there was who caused all sorts of laughing remarks to pass between the onlookers.

This was Buster Billings, who occupied a position near the centre of the line. The fat boy looked entirely out of place, but his round, red face was covered with a smile, and he invariably met the badinage of his many friends with cheery replies:

"Laugh all you're a mind to, fellows!" he would call out, when the tumult grew in volume, amidst pretended objections, and cries of "Put him out! Put him out! He takes up too much room!"

"But honest now, Buster!" cried one fellow, "you can't hope to win against such a field. Have some pity on the others, won't you?"

"Ever hear the story of the race between the tortoise and the hare?" jeered Buster; "all right, consider me the tortoise, will you, fellows? There's a chance for me up to the time the winner gets back here to the starting line. I'm going to make the race if it takes me till sundown."

The course was to be up the river, as the ice was said to be better that way than down. Two miles above Clifford there was a well known spot where a bunch of silver birch trees hung over the bank. The boys called it "The Birches," and it was often said that the fishing for bass was better near that spot than anywhere else on the whole river, just why, no one knew.

The committee of arrangements had sent a couple of good skaters up some time before, with instructions to remain there until the contestants had rounded the terminal mark, and started back. They were also to take the time of each skater, and in various other ways assist in seeing that the match went along smoothly.

It was called the "Consolation Race," and was intended to offset some of the well known heart-burnings among the schoolboys who had not been able to get on the hockey team, or even serve in the capacity of substitutes.

Lanky was the only one belonging to the team who competed. No objection had been raised to his entering because several fellows wanted to show how they were his superiors in speed, and that Lanky was now a back number.

Of course many of the girls were present to see the race. They spurred their favorites on with merry shouts. Lanky was a favorite with a considerable number of the Columbia High young people; while there were also quite a few who would have been glad could they see some newcomer beat the old winner out.

"You'll have to do your best, if you want to come in ahead, Lanky," Frank advised his chum, just as the latter skated forward to take a place in line near the outer edge, for Lanky was too modest to thrust

himself in the middle, as though eager to be in the spotlight all the time.

"I guess so, Frank," was the confident reply, "but don't worry about me. If some swift skaters have been developed since last year, I happen to know I've picked up some speed myself."

"That's right, I'm sure you have," assented the other.

"But even if they edge me out," continued the smiling Lanky, "what's the odds? A fellow doesn't want to hog everything in sight all the time."

"And if another skater creeps ahead of you so as to get here in time to win, you'll be one of the first to give him a cheer!" affirmed Frank, who knew what a love for fair sport the tall contestant had.

"If he won fairly and squarely I certainly would," replied Lanky; "but I'd feel mean if I found there was any sort of game set up to blanket me by some of the crowd, so as to give the advantage to their favorite."

"I'd keep clear of the bunch all I could, then, Lanky," advised Frank.

"Just what I intend to do," came the reply.

Presently it was announced that all the contestants were in line who would be permitted to start. It was seen that a dozen fellows who had been boasting of late about their sudden development in the way

of remarkable speed were all there, every one looking confident and eager. Why, even Buster Billings might have been reckoned a sure winner, if brave smiles counted for anything.

Minnie Cuthbert was present, along with some of her chums, and Frank joined the group as one of the committee gave the finishing instructions to the numerous contestants.

"This is going to be a fair race, remember, all of you," the latter was saying, "and by that we mean every tub has got to stand on its own bottom. If we hear of any combinations among the contestants, looking to 'pocketing' a skater so he can't do his best, the committee will declare it no race, so you'll all have to try it over again. And those who are guilty of unsportsmanlike conduct will be debarred from entering a second time. Some of us hope a new champion will develop, but he's got to win his laurels by ability, not trickery. Ready now!"

Frank thought he saw several of the fellows near Lanky look uneasy at hearing these words from the starter. The next instant, however, the pistol cracked, and away went the host of agile skaters.

Loud cheers signalized the start. It had been particularly requested that none of the spectators attempt to accompany the contestants even a part of the route. Such a move would only confuse many of them.

Buster Billings went off at what for him was a furious pace. His arms were working with every stroke of his dumpy legs, reminding Frank of a Dutch windmill in full operation.

They cheered him to the echo, for Buster was a universal favorite; but of course no one believed for a minute that he had the ghost of a chance.

"They'd all have to fall dead before Buster could come in ahead!" one fellow shouted.

"Why, it's a ten mile run, and he'd melt clean away long before he got back!" another announced, gleefully.

"If he keeps his word to go over the full course," suggested a third boy, "count on him showing up about nine o'clock to-night."

"Ten to one he rests up, and then starts back so as to fool us into believing he beat the whole string out!" laughed still another schoolboy.

Frank skated around with Minnie, and then some of the other girls. He meant to wait for the race to be decided, hoping that Lanky would prove himself the same unbeatable wonder that he had in past years, when it came to a ten mile run in a free-for-all race.

Finally a great shout went up.

"There they come!"

A lone figure was seen to shoot into sight from around the first bend.

"Whoop! it's the tortoise, after all!" shouted a sharp-eyed fellow, laughingly. "What d'you think of that now, for a miracle?"

"Buster wins the race!" whooped several, as though they really believed it.

"Ho!" observed Jack Comfort, one of the Columbia seven, "chances are he was lying low around that bend there, and started home when he glimpsed the first batch coming above. We ought to see them pretty quick now!"

"There they come now!" roared a voice suddenly.

Three boys were seen in the lead, all making extraordinary speed on the home stretch. Frank was pleased to discover that one of the trio was Lanky. On they came until only a hundred yards away from where two fellows stood holding the tape that the leader must breast.

Lanky's rivals were a pair of the ambitious fellows who had hoped to wrest his title of champion ten-mile skater away from him. Frank noted instantly that while the tall fellow looked as grim and determined as ever, there were anxious expressions on the faces of the others.

"They know they've been forced to their utmost, and are nearly all in!" was what the experienced eye of Frank Allen told him, as turning to Minnie he remarked: "Now watch Lanky *fly!*"

Well, that word was about the only one to de-

scribe how Lanky Wallace all at once shot ahead of the other two, as though fired from a gun. A mighty yell went up from scores of throats. Even those who deep down in their secret hearts would have liked to see a new champion, could not but admire that tremendous and dazzling spurt. Besides, it was a Columbia High student who sped far ahead of the others and shot past the judges.

The first thing Lanky did was to whirl around, and rush up to grip a hand of each of his competitors.

"You gave me the hardest rub I've ever had to win out," he told them, "and another time the chances are one of you will beat me."

Again the crowd shouted for Lanky; for if there is one thing that is admired in a race it is that fair spirit of fellowship among those who compete that causes the first thought of the winner to turn toward those less fortunate. So Sampson handed back his sword to the gallant Spanish admiral whose ships he had sunk down at Santiago, and helped to cement the abiding friendship between our country and Spain.

When Lanky could break away from the crowd he sought out his chum Frank.

"Listen, Frank," he said; "would you believe it, while I was spinning along up the river I glimpsed that stranger you and Paul think got away with his watch. He was dressed in corduroy, and had a shotgun and dogs with him!"

CHAPTER XI

DISAPPOINTMENT

"ARE you sure about that, Lanky?" asked Frank, interested immediately.

"As much so as any fellow could be when he was flying along in a race, with a couple of sprinters just ahead of him," came the reply.

"Tell me more about it," the other continued. "I'd be so glad for poor Paul's sake if we could get track of that stranger."

"Why, you see, it was this way," Lanky explained. "At the time I was above Clifford, and close to the place where we expected to turn. The ice happened to be wonderfully smooth and clear. so there was little to be afraid of."

"You mean in the way of flaws, and sticks frozen in part way?" suggested Frank.

"Yes, that's about the size of it," returned the tall chum. "Just then something caught my eye on the shore. It was a dog running over the snow, and a rabbit dog at that, nosing around in and out of the bushes."

"Yes, they say there are more rabbits this year than ever before known, Lanky; and I meant to ask you to go out with me to try our luck some day soon."

"I could only take that one swift look, you understand," continued Lanky; "but it happened that the dog's master was standing in full view, watching the three of us go past. He waved his hand like a man would who liked sport of all kinds."

"Yes, I remember that the owner of that team said he couldn't forget he had been a boy himself, and had steered a bobsled many a time," interrupted Frank, as though to clinch the truth of Lanky's speculation.

"I saw his face as plainly as I do yours this minute."

"And it was that stranger?" asked the other.

"No other, I give you my word," replied the tall skater. "Even in the heat of the race, which was about as speedy a one as I've ever been in, I had an overpowering conviction, if you can call it that, telling me it was the man Paul's been looking for high and low."

"You came past the same place again, of course?" Frank pursued.

"Sure I did," Lanky admitted, "and not long afterwards, too."

"But you didn't see him again, I take it?"

"Never a sign," came the reply. "I thought I heard his dog yapping back in the woods, as though he had struck the trail of a bunny; but just then the other fellows started a sprint, and I had to keep my eyes ahead up to the very second we got to the tape. They were a fast bunch, let me tell you."

"I don't suppose it would pay us to go away back there beyond Clifford, and see if we could run across the man?" mused Frank.

"Oh! I'd do that in a jiffy, if I thought it'd be worth our while," the other lad returned, "but you see Paul isn't here to join us, and by the time we found him and got up there it'd be too late."

"But you must see him to-night, and tell him about it."

"I mean to do that. Fact is, I had my mind all made up to drop in on my way home and explain my discovery."

"It'll make Paul pick up hope again," remarked Frank, gladly, for he had been feeling badly over the other chum's trouble, not to mention the fact that his enforced absence from the team weakened the Columbia seven perceptibly.

"I'd give a heap if he could only find that watch again," observed Lanky. "Guess every inch of that ground where we had the upset has been gone over again and again as if with a fine-tooth comb, but it isn't there."

"Someone got the watch," asserted Frank; "there's not the least doubt about that part of it in my mind."

"And the question is, who did?" said Lanky, gritting his teeth. "All I can say is that it was a low-down trick, and the party who took the watch, whether it was that stranger or someone else, ought to be shot for doing it."

"Well, if you're through skating for to-day, let's go over and see what sort of prize they're going to give you and then trail along home."

Lanky laughed.

"I'd already made up my mind not to accept a prize," he said.

"Oh! but you won it fairly and squarely," objected Frank.

"I know that," added the other, "but I feel kind of mean about it. You see, this was meant to be a sort of Consolation affair, for those boys who didn't make the hockey team this year. I really hadn't any business to run with them."

"Yes, you did, Lanky," declared Frank; "in fact, they invited you in particular to enter, because several of them expected to leave you trailing behind."

"Yes, I guess they though Lanky Wallace was a has-been," said the tall fellow, with a grin. "It was kind of them to give me a chance to show that

I'm still in the ring. But here we are with the crowd."

"And they're expecting you, too," added Frank.

The race committee stood surrounded by a couple of hundred boys and girls. In his hand the spokesman held a handsome silver cup.

"I'm requested by the committee to award this cup to you, Lanky Wallace," this young man said. "Everybody is agreed that you won it fairly. Some of us hoped a new champion of the ten-mile skate would crop up; but it seems that he's still got to be coming. We all admit that up to now there hasn't happened along anybody who can get in faster than you. Here's your cup, Lanky."

Lanky took it and nodded his head half a dozen times, as though he would embrace the whole assemblage.

"Much obliged, fellows," he said, in his customary free-and-easy fashion. "I'll take the prize, but only on one condition. Every year after this a free-for-all race shall be run on the Harrapin, open to any and all Columbia High boys, and for this same cup. It shall never be held for more than two years in succession by any contestant. If he comes in ahead that often he must be eliminated from the next year's race. Understand that, everybody?"

"Hurrah for Lanky Wallace!" shouted someone.

Even the disappointed racers joined in with heart and soul, for they realized the true spirit of unselfishness that caused Lanky to speak as he did.

So with the silver cup carelessly gripped in one hand, Lanky turned to Frank, and remarked:

"Now if you're ready, I'll trot along home with you. I want to talk about something else before I forget it."

Presently they were by themselves, and Lanky took up the subject again.

"It was about my new iceboat I was speaking," he explained.

"You've got it about done, then, eh?"

"She's ready for her trial spin," the other boy continued, "and I wanted you to promise me to be my partner to-morrow right after school, unless the snow comes along and spoils everything, which I hope it won't."

"Same with me," agreed Frank, who, however, was thinking more about the second hockey match on the coming Saturday than a spin in Lanky's new iceboat.

"Then I can depend on you, can I?" demanded the tall boat-builder, eagerly. It could be plainly seen how his heart was set upon the success of several things he had incorporated in his new venture.

"Yes, I'll go along, and glad of the chance," Frank agreed.

Shortly afterward they separated, and just before they did so Lanky remarked:

"I'll call up Paul on the 'phone, and tell him about that man. It's much too late this afternoon for him to do anything; but I warrant you he gets permission to keep out of school to-morrow morning, and spend all his time roving through that country up above Clifford, on this side of the river."

"I only hope he'll be able to find the stranger," Frank called out.

"Yes, and get the watch back," added the other boy, with a confidence in the guilt of the unknown man that was refreshing, to say the least.

Another day came along, and still the fine weather continued. The boys and girls of Columbia High were happy in the thought that the spell of crisp sunny days might even hold over another Saturday, which was now close at hand.

The talk was almost wholly of the coming match, and the chances of Columbia High were canvassed from every side, not without some misgiving.

It was hoped that fortune might turn around this time and give them the victory. Should the tie have to be played off a defeat would not seem quite so bad as two straight games lost.

Just as Frank and Lanky had expected, Paul Bird was absent from school that morning. The others had no difficulty in guessing where he must

be, and as their glances fell occasionally upon the snow-covered landscape as seen from the windows in the school building, they doubtless indulged in hopes that their chum might be meeting with a fair measure of success in his search for the elusive stranger.

As soon as school was out in the afternoon, the two chums came together. As they were both taking only certain studies Frank and Lanky could be dismissed some time before most of the other scholars, whenever they chose.

This was very convenient for boys who were as fond of winter sports as they had always been, since it gave them plenty of opportunity to do many things they had in mind.

"Of course you told Paul what you expected to?" Frank asked, as they hurried along, heading toward the river.

"Sure I did, and it was just as we figured," replied Lanky.

"He said he'd get permission to stay out of school to-day and put in his time looking around up Clifford way?" queried Frank.

"He got an idea in his head that while nobody around Columbia seemed to recognize the stranger from his description, he might have better luck up there."

"Well, we can soon find out if he got on the track," remarked Frank, with a chuckle; "because

there's Paul right now, heading for home with some bundles he's been down to the store to fetch."

Lanky gave a loud and peculiar whistle, that was known to be his individual signal. Immediately the boy crossing the street looked up, and waved his hand.

"He's stopping to wait for us," Frank remarked.

"But I don't reckon Paul's got any good news to tell us," the tall boy added, as they approached the waiting Paul.

"He doesn't look very bright and happy, that's a fact," muttered Frank, really disappointed; for at first when he saw Paul wave his hand a hope had leaped up in his heart that all might be well.

Paul nodded to them as they came up.

"I warrant that you're rushing off by yourselves, bent on trying out that new ice yacht Lanky's been tinkering on so long?" he ventured.

"Yes," replied the builder, promptly, "it's all ready for a spin and as the breeze cuts across the river to-day, making it fine to go either up or down, we want to get busy."

"It was kind of you to call me up, Lanky, and tell me what you did," continued Paul; "I've been asking everybody up there about that man."

"But you didn't hit on his trail, I'm afraid," ventured Lanky.

"It's mighty queer," pursued Paul, bitterly, "but nobody seems to know anything about him."

CHAPTER XII

THE RIVAL ICEBOATS

Paul Bird knew Lanky was very anxious to get down at his iceboat, and so he did not detain them any longer.

"They're waiting for some of these things I'm bringing back home," he stated, "and I'll try and see you again, to ask a few more questions, and tell you what poor luck I had around Clifford. Hope you have a good run on the ice. Keep an eye out for Walt Ackerman."

"Hello! do you happen to know anything about that iceboat of his?" asked Lanky, turning around in his sudden desire to obtain information.

"I was told that he is waiting to waylay you, and give you a race, the very first chance that comes along," called Paul.

This gave Lanky something to ponder over as he and Frank pursued their way down to where he had a shed near the river. He kept this locked all of the time, and here he had spent considerable time with his carpenter tools of late.

"Now, that may be Walt's game, you see, Frank," he remarked, as though he might have reached a certain conclusion.

"You mean making you race before you really know what your iceboat can do; is that it?"

"Yes, because Walt's a sharp fellow, you know, and somehow he's been my rival ever since he struck town. But let him spring a surprise on me, if he feels that would be clean sport. He's been using his boat on the ice for some time now, and must have her tuned up to her best work."

"It would hardly be what I call a fair deal," objected Frank.

"Huh! people look at things lots of different ways," grunted the other. "What's one fellow's food is poison to another, they say. Walt seems to be a boy who wants to get there, and isn't very particular how he does it. That kind of fellow would cheat himself in a game, if he was playing it alone."

"But you can refuse to accept a challenge?" expostulated Frank.

Lanky shrugged his shoulders.

"Can I?" he remarked; "did you know me to take water from any fellow, ever since we've been going together?"

"Well, I don't remember that I ever did," replied the other, with a laugh. "You don't seem to be one of the backing-down kind. There isn't a chip

on your shoulder all the time, showing that you're spoiling for a fight; but a race is a different thing."

"Here we are, Frank, and now for some fun!"

Unlocking the doors of the shed he had hired for a trifling sum, Lanky threw them wide open. Presently he and Frank were busy getting the mast stepped, and the new sail bent to the boom.

They chattered as they worked, the proud boat-builder explaining a number of devices that he had seen fit to incorporate in his latest creation, intended for skimming over the ice with the speed of a gull.

"What do you think of her, Frank?" the tall boy presently asked, when everything seemed ready for a start.

A few small boys and girls, who had been skating near the shore, watched by some elderly women, had gathered to look with wonder and awe upon the queer contraption; because an iceboat is indeed a marvelous affair. Lanky made sure to lock up the shed, for he had numerous tools lying around in there that he would not want taken or played with.

"Honestly, I don't know just what to say," replied the other boy.

"Do you like her lines?" persisted the builder, who thought considerable of the other's opinion, and wished to find out whether Frank condemned his handiwork, or only waited to be convinced by actual demonstration.

"Couldn't be better, for speed," Frank told him; "and I should say she'd prove as safe as any iceboat could. They're all as cranky as anything. I'm only wondering how those little innovations you've tried are going to turn out."

"Of course," Lanky observed, "if I find they're a fizzle I can drop them off, and go at things the old way. But somehow I've got a heap of confidence in a couple of my ideas. We'll find out to-day whether they do increase the speed of the boat, or turn out frauds."

"The more I turn the thing over in my mind," admitted Frank, "the better I seem to like one of your schemes. I've got a hunch myself it may prove to be a wonder in the end, though it increases the danger of a spill."

"Oh! yes, I know that," responded the other boy, carelessly, as though he did not bother his head much about such a small matter, if only he could add to the speed of his craft. "Let's get aboard, and start off. Hi! there, kids, get out of the way; it's dangerous standing in front of this iceboat, don't you know?"

Another minute and amidst faint cries from the little folks the wonderful craft went whizzing off, the large sail catching the breeze like a blanket. First Lanky headed down toward Bellport, though

he was under the impression that the ice would be found better up-river way.

"How does it feel, Frank?" the skipper asked, after they had flown for some two miles along the ice-covered Harrapin, with a steady wind filling the sail.

"Splendid!" replied the other.

"Think I've made a pretty decent job out of it, then?" pursued Lanky.

"I'm giving it to you straight when I say that it beats your old spinner all to pieces. Now let's see what you can do with your little scheme. There's a good wide stretch ahead of us."

A minute later Frank once more called out.

"It was a close call for a spill that time, let me tell you, but we'll learn to watch out for it again."

"But was it worth taking the risk for? Seemed to me we did scoot along considerably faster just then. You know I only meant to make use of it in an emergency, if the other fellow seemed about to pass me, or I had to catch up."

"It looks good to me," he was told; "but I won't pass judgment on it so soon. The ice seems getting poorer down this way; don't you think we'd have easier running if you headed up-stream again?"

"Just what I was going to propose. And here's a good place to make the swing around. Look out for your head when the boom comes over. I'm

going to try jibing and see what that mast can stand."

The maneuver was carried through without the least difficulty, and soon they went speeding upstream again. Passing Columbia they continued on.

"Now when we strike the bends up ahead we'll learn how she handles herself in tacking, and beating up against the wind," the anxious skipper remarked.

"I'm not borrowing any trouble," said Frank, with a confidence that touched the heart of his chum.

Really the new iceboat did answer her helm wonderfully well. Lanky was heard to give an occasional satisfied grunt after some difficult operation.

"She's sure a dandy, Frank, if I do say it myself!" he announced, as they passed Clifford at a fast clip, Frank blowing a horn they had with them, as a warning to some skaters they saw to clear the track.

"You ought to be proud of her," asserted the passenger, who, however, was making himself useful in many different ways, when called upon.

"Why, with this breeze," remarked Lanky, "I could cover twelve miles in next to no time."

"H'm, the Baxters live just about that far up-river from Columbia, don't they?" Frank cas-

ually mentioned, stealing a look across at the face of his chum in time to see it turn fiery red, though Lanky laughed.

"Like to get one on me, don't you, Frank?" he said. "I don't care who knows it,—Dora Baxter is as pretty as a peach, and I'm proud to be her company to all the barn dances, on straw rides, and everything like that. Now comes another test when we strike this sharp bend. Steady all!"

More miles were put to their credit, and soon Lanky announced that as they had reached the last wide place it might be just as well to turn, so as to start back home.

"Seeing as we haven't any special invitation up beyond," Frank told him, "guess that'd be a good thing. This stretch is where we had our little circus with that wild dog pack, remember?"

"I should think I did," replied the other, as he started to make the turn with a deftness that stamped him a clever skipper.

They had gone only a short distance when Frank gave utterance to an exclamation.

"Look, Lanky!" he called out, "Walt and his partner must have known you'd be up here this afternoon. They came ahead of us, and have been lying in wait behind the point. There he comes swinging out right now, you see."

"That means a race, doesn't it?" cried Lanky, not a whit dismayed.

"Walt will dare you, that's sure," Frank admitted. "He'll never be happy until it's been proven which is the faster, his new boat or yours."

"All right, I'm game for a try!" declared Lanky, between his set teeth.

The rival craft was so timed that it would swing alongside as the two sped down the river. Walt Ackerman was holding the tiller, and from his manner it seemed as though he knew all about running any sort of an iceboat. He had come from the upper Hudson River, where such craft are numerous during cold winters.

"Try you for a run to the bridge at Columbia, Lanky!" he called out.

"Just as you like," the other skipper sent back, assuming an indifference Frank knew very well he did not feel. "First one to pass under comes in ahead. My boat's a new one, and I haven't had a chance to get her tuned up yet; but all the same I reckon I can show you a clean pair of heels, Walt."

"Talk is cheap!" flashed the other, who had not felt very amiable toward Frank's tall chum for some time, and never lost an opportunity to challenge him, though as yet they had not come to blows.

The race was now on. How those strange craft did fly along down the river like frightened birds! When a turn was met that necessitated "reaching," it seemed as though the skippers were equally ex-

pert in handling their craft. Now Lanky blanketed his opponent, and was in turn shut off from the wind.

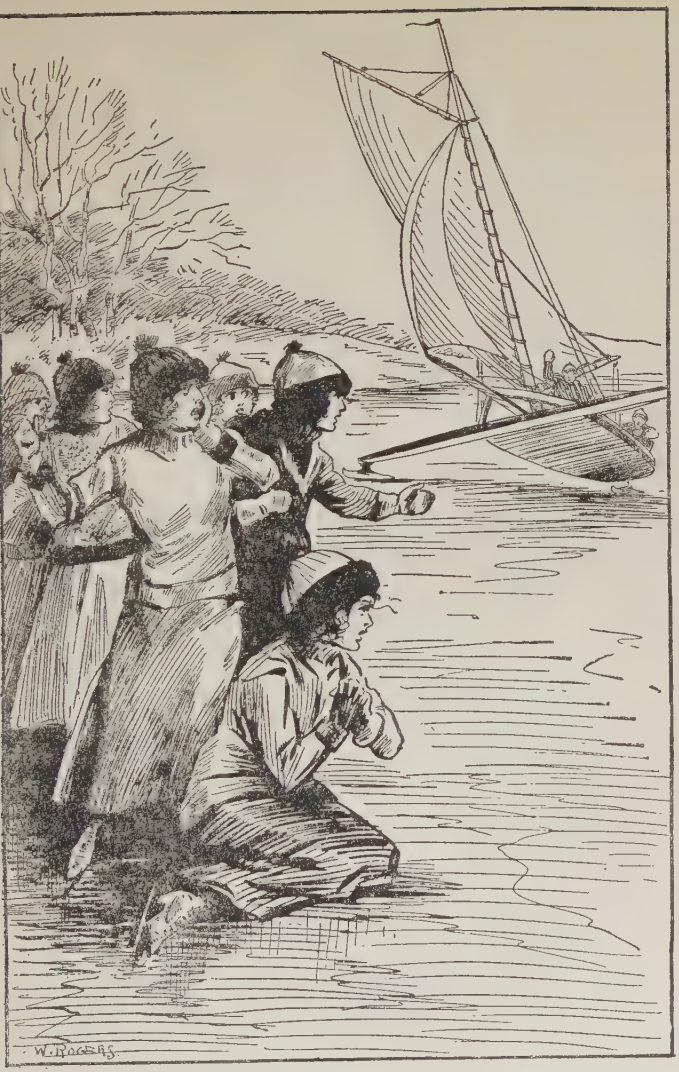
Clifford was sighted ahead, with the two iceboats spinning along neck and neck, though separated by possibly thirty feet or so.

Just then Lanky uttered a cry of chagrin and alarm. Frank understood what had caused this, for he too saw that several girls, skating on the river, had come to a stop to observe the advancing ice yachts. As luck would have it they were directly in the path of Lanky's craft, and this necessitated a quick turning movement, if he would avoid a collision.

Of course Lanky did not hesitate a second in doing this. The race might be lost to him through this little set-back; but that made no difference when otherwise an accident was sure to happen.

So the new iceboat swung around the huddled girls, who apparently hardly understood how near they had been to danger.

"We've lost a heap by that," grumbled Lanky, after he had once again straightened out his course, and could see the rival boat, ahead of him, with Walt's grinning face turned back to taunt him; "but we're not beaten yet, and won't be till the bridge is reached. Now to try my speed game the next chance I get!"



SEVERAL GIRLS WERE DIRECTLY IN THE PATH OF LANKY'S CRAFT.—*Page* 112.

Boys of Columbia High in Winter Sports.

CHAPTER XIII

TO THE RESCUE

"Now show us what you can do!" cried Frank, more interested in the outcome of the race than he had thought possible.

Perhaps it had been the sight of Walt's face wreathed in smiles of anticipated triumph that stirred Frank. He did not have any particular dislike for the boy, but he knew that Walt was determined to rub it into Lanky on every possible occasion. Walt had been one of the prime movers back of the skating match which, as we have seen, Lanky had won so handsomely. That result must have embittered the boy more than ever; and so he continued to look back and grin.

"I will," replied the skipper of the new craft, "as soon as we get around that next bend. There'll be a chance to try it out then. Steady her all you can, Frank. You know she's apt to go over if the wind picks up suddenly while I'm trying my game."

"Depend on me, Lanky."

Frank's steady voice doubtless gave the other additional confidence. Then he also had great faith in the latest creation of his hands, and believed he could depend on his iceboat to stand the strain.

As soon as the bend had been reached Lanky saw his chance, and by the time the next change in course came about he had diminished the lead of the rival boat to less than one-third. Walt evidently did not understand how the other could manage to creep up on him so wonderfully.

"Another turn like that and you've got him trailing after you, Lanky!" said the other chum, thrilled by the closeness of the race.

"It's coming at the next turn, then!" announced the captain, confidently. "History's going to repeat itself."

"Now watch out and don't be reckless, Lanky. If you run this through the game's in your hands. Steady now, he's trying to get in your way. You know what to do in that case?"

"Do I? You keep your eye on your uncle, and see."

Apparently Walt Ackerman was disposed to resort to unfair tactics in order to keep Lanky from passing him. He supposed that by pushing steadily to the right he could force the other to remain in the rear, since it would seem to be impossible for him to pass on.

Too late did he learn that the artful Lanky was prepared for just such an unsportsmanlike trick. Suddenly Lanky changed his course. There was a cry of mingled rage and chagrin from the other skipper, who hastened to follow suit; but unfortunately his boat was not equipped with that new device which the inventive Lanky had installed on his new craft.

The consequence was that Walt found himself trailing behind his rival when he presently managed to get on the new tack. Lanky was grimly determined he should not be headed again; nor was he, for when the bridge over the Harrapin at Columbia was reached Lanky led by as much as thirty feet.

Of course Walt felt deeply chagrined at his failure to arrive first.

"You did manage in some way to get in ahead of me, Lanky," he called out later, "And I don't just understand how it happened. I was well ahead, and going as smooth as silk. Guess I must have made some little mistake in that reach below Clifford. It won't happen another time."

Lanky might have retaliated by saying he hoped that if they ever raced again he would not be compelled to go around some frightened girls, and thus lose his position in the contest, which he had to make up afterwards as best he could. But he held his tongue.

"I'm satisfied, Walt," was all he remarked; "and some other day we'll try things out again, if you feel like it. My boat ought to do better right along, as things get in shape. Everything's brand new, you know."

As they had had enough of it for that time, and Lanky wanted to remedy several small faults while they were fresh in his mind, the new iceboat was put in the shed. Frank hung around chatting, while the owner of the craft tinkered industriously.

"One more day, and then comes Saturday," Lanky said later.

"And our second game with Clifford," the other observed. "I'd like to take a run up there again to-morrow afternoon, if you'll go along."

"What to do?" asked the worker as he secured a stay to his mast so that when the stick was stepped again he could make it more rigid than before.

"Oh! well, look over the ice, for one thing," Frank admitted. "Clifford sent some of her team down the day before we had our game, so I understand. It's a good thing to be familiar with your field, you understand."

"I believe you," replied the other. "Fact is, I know it from experience. Sure I'll go along. If the wind's fair we can take the boat, though I reckon it might be best to skate up, for then we can run around the field they use for hockey."

The river was by this time getting exceedingly lively, for scores were skating, and merry laughter could be heard in every direction. The conclusion of the iceboat race had been witnessed by a good many persons, and the cheers that arose when Lanky ran under the bridge some distance ahead of his rival could not have poured balm on the wounded feelings of the defeated aspirant for honors.

Lanky found plenty to do pottering around his new pride until it was time to start home to supper. Frank, not having brought his skates along, did not try to cut any figure on the ice.

"Fact is," he explained to the other when Lanky urged him to join some of the girls, and have a good time, "I thought it just as well to give my ankles a rest-up for a day. One of them was bothering me a little, and I want to be in trim for Saturday, you know."

They walked home together, and Minnie Cuthbert felt a little provoked with Frank because he had seemed to prefer to stay in that pokey old shed talking with and assisting Lanky, when he might have gone home for his skates and spent an hour in her company. Not that Minnie lacked partners at any time, for she was too pretty and lively a girl to be left as a wall flower in a dance, or to skate by herself at any time.

That night Frank called Lanky on the telephone.

"I happened to run across Paul after I left you," he told him, "and when I mentioned what we thought of doing after school on Friday he asked if we'd have any objections to his going along."

"Of course you told him we'd be only too glad of his company?" remarked Lanky.

"Just the words I used," replied the other boy. "Paul said that while it looked as though he wasn't going to get a show on the hockey team this season, because of his hard luck with that watch, still he felt a whole lot of interest in everything that went on."

"Isn't it too bad about Paul?" declared Lanky, and in a tone that showed he meant it. "But between you'n me, Frank, I rather guess Paul's got some sort of notion in his head that he might happen to run across that man up around Clifford way."

"If he had it would be only natural," Frank asserted, "because finding the stranger would mean considerable to him."

"Yes, he'd have it settled one way or the other, for keeps," said Lanky; and after the exchange of a few more sentences Frank rang off.

Again did the morning open auspiciously. A few clouds hovered in the southwest, but by ten oclock even these seemed to be ashamed to creep any higher, so as to threaten a change in the wonderful

stretch of fine weather that was making a record calculated to stand for years.

As agreed upon the three friends came together, after they had been dimissed on that afternoon. They had carried their skates to school, so that they might not lose time in running home after them. This was a common occurrence, and the head master, Professor Tyson Parke, permitted it, on condition that the scholars took care not to abuse the privilege.

As before, when they got down to the river only a few small children with their nurses or mothers were playing on the ice, all others being still in school.

"Seems to me we're having the greatest spell of winter sports this season of any year I can remember," Frank remarked as they strapped their glistening skates on securely, and started out, three abreast.

"It's going to make a record, for a fact," Lanky admitted; "but for one I'll feel a whole lot disgusted if Clifford walks away with that second game to-morrow."

"Let's tell ourselves they never will do it," said Paul, bravely hiding the pain he felt at not being allowed to participate in the stirring melee on the ice, for hockey was a game he particularly liked.

"That's the way to put it, Paul," Frank up

and said, cheerily. "Everything depends on how Hazen carries himself. If he happens to have a good day we win."

"And if he chooses to make a few of his bonehead plays we lose," grumbled the long-legged chum, as he sped gracefully along on the outside edge. Lanky had always been a splendid skater, despite his size; he might seem a bit clumsy in some ways, but once on the ice he was a wizard at cutting figures and doing many of the fancy stunts boys love to practice.

Paul Bird had heard about the little brush of the rival iceboats on the afternoon before, and of course wanted to know all that had happened. Lanky and Frank were willing to accommodate him to the best of their ability, as they struck out up the river.

"Seems like all sorts of bully things keep happening these days, and nights," the former remarked, after he had about exhausted the subject of Walt Ackerman's ambition, and its setback. "But that lively little scrimmage with the dogs was the warmest proposition of all."

"I'm in hard luck this year, fellows," observed Paul, rather sadly; "things keep happening while I'm not in the crowd. Nothing worth mentioning has bobbed up when I've been along, except that miserable upset, at the time I lost dad's watch. I

don't suppose either of you have found a trace of that man with the team, who was hunting up above Clifford?"

"Never a thing," asserted Frank.

"And while we're up this way," added Lanky, "I might as well show you just where I saw him and his rabbit dog. Of course we could see his tracks in the light snow, but much good they'd do us."

"It might be some satisfaction if I saw even his tracks," returned Paul. "I'd be almost tempted to try and follow his trail, and find out that way just where he puts up. It's mighty strange that so far I've run across no one who knows him, or even who he can be."

"Keep it up, Paul," advised Frank, "sooner or later you may run across someone who could give you a pointer. If he's up here for the hunting he must get supplies from some store. If you haven't tackled every one in town, try that dodge."

"I will, Frank, and let me tell you it's not a bad idea. We're getting near Clifford, you see. And there's a pack of children playing on the ice."

"They'd better get away from that place," said Lanky, uneasily. "Unless I'm off in my calculations the ice is bad right around there. That's why that brush was stood up in a blow-hole to mark danger. Oh! Frank, something's happened!"

Shrill screams broke upon their hearing, and

there was seen a scattering of the small children who had a moment before been chasing one another with shouts of joy.

"Skate hard, fellows!" cried Frank Allen. "One of them has broken through, and may drown in the river before help comes! Skate for all you're worth!"

CHAPTER XIV

WHAT TO DO IN AN EMERGENCY

THE three lads were quickly bearing down upon the spot where they could just detect a struggling figure in the water. A small boy had broken through the ice at a point where it was softened by the warmer water coming up from a spring at the bottom of the river. He had managed to clutch the edge of the ice, but could only cling there desperately, unable to clamber out.

Frank's one fear was that the lad might lose his slender grip, and be carried under the ice by the current of the river, always more or less swift.

"Get those rails from that fence, fellows!" he snapped out, for one of the very first things to do in case such an accident happens, is to secure something with which to make a support for the knees of the rescuer, in this way spreading out his weight, and saving himself from breaking through.

Away flew Paul and Lanky to obey. They did not stop to ask questions, and seemed fully willing

to do whatever Frank said. He had led them on so many fields, and most times to victory, that they had the utmost confidence in his capacity to size a situation up, and lay quick plans.

Frank himself wanted to get in touch with the imperilled boy, if only it might be done. If it were necessary he would jump in and seize hold of him, depending on the others coming with the rails before his strength should be gone.

He shouted at the other children to keep far back and out of the way. Then he threw himself down on hands and knees. It was Frank's intention to crawl out as far as he dared, so as to be near the small boy.

"Keep holding on like everything, boy!" he said cheerfully. "They're fetching some rails from the fence, and we'll soon have you out again."

Even while saying this Frank was detaching his skates with all the haste possible. He wanted to have his feet free should it become necessary for him to jump into the water. This he meant to do in case he saw that the boy had let go his hold, but only as a last resort would he attempt such a move.

The boy tried to answer him; indeed his lips moved, but not a sound came, for his vocal cords were either paralyzed from fright, or the cold water had done it for him.

Taking a hasty look to one side Frank saw that

his two chums had succeeded in wrenching several long fence rails loose, and were coming toward him with all haste.

Yet to Frank it seemed as though the boys had never skated slower. In his nervous condition he forgot to take into consideration that they were carrying heavy burdens, which prevented any great speed.

"Steady, boy, keep your grip as long as you can!" Frank kept saying; yet he saw to his alarm that the little fellow's hands were slowly but surely slipping from the ice, though he continued to hold on with might and main.

Frank hurriedly threw off his coat. An idea had flashed through his active brain. If only the boy could have something to grip besides digging his nails into the elusive ice he might manage to maintain his hold until the rails arrived.

"Here, see if you can reach that sleeve!" he told him, as he made a dexterous cast with the coat.

Three seconds later his heart was almost in his throat as he saw the boy endeavor to do as he had told him. There was one time when Frank felt sure the worst had come, and he came very near making a frenzied leap, clearing the ice and plunging into the hole.

But just in time he held himself in check. He saw that the little fellow had managed to clutch the

end of the dangling sleeve, and now held on to the cloth with both his hands.

Then up came the other boys.

"Tell us what to do with them, Frank!" cried Lanky.

"Shove then along past me, both of you!" replied Frank, steadily, because he did not want to frighten the little chap by appearing alarmed or excited. Then he said: "I want you to take hold of this coat, and keep it just so, Paul. Lanky, follow me out so that you can grab my foot, and pull me back if I tell you to."

They knew now what his programme was. He would use the rails to support his weight, and reaching the edge of the hole attempt to pull the boy out.

Other people were to be seen coming on the run now, one of the men carrying a coil of rope with him. But they would all have arrived too late had it not been for Frank's clever idea of the coat.

When Frank leaned over and fastened his fingers upon the arm of the boy who was in the water, he had to exert himself to the utmost in order to drag the little fellow out. As the latter's clothes were saturated with water it was quite a task, but fortunately Frank was sturdy, and with Lanky giving what assistance he could from the rear, he presently found himself retreating in good order, carrying the boy along with him.

Then loud cries broke out from the other children, and grown-ups as well. The rescued boy was hardly able to stand, his struggles in the cold water had so exhausted him.

"Push for the shore, everybody!" called out Frank, who was afraid that such a throng as was rapidly gathering might bring about a tragedy alongside which the peril of the lad would be small.

Even in that moment of excitement, and when success had come to crown his efforts, Frank could look ahead and see what the part of wisdom was.

All this while Frank had hold of the small, water-soaked boy, around whose shoulders he had thrown his own coat, because he saw the little chap was shivering as though he would go to pieces.

"Willie Shaw fell in, and near got drown-ded!" shrilled one urchin.

There was a feminine shriek. One of the women hurrying to the spot was seen to act as though frantic. Frank, looking, had no trouble in guessing this must be Willie Shaw's mother, and that what she heard had terrified her.

She darted upon the boy, and regardless of his saturated condition hugged him convulsively. Frank saw that another woman had thoughtfully brought a warm blanket with her.

"That relieves me of letting out my coat any longer," he told Lanky, with a little laugh. "You

make the change if you can, Lanky; I'd rather keep away."

Lanky seemed to know just what was in the other's mind, for he too hated having any sort of a fuss made over him for such a little thing as "just pulling a kid out of the river."

Frank counted without his host, however. Some of the women had seen his brave act in rescuing Willie, and they must have caused the mother to realize the debt she owed him.

Leaving the other woman to wrap the shivering boy in the warm blanket, she started toward Frank. Possibly the boy might have run off only that Lanky purposely held back with the coat; and then again Frank realized his action would look silly.

So he stood there with red cheeks while that mother thanked him again and again. His cheeks grew scarlet when she actually kissed him, and said she would make it an object to visit Columbia as soon as she could, so as to let Frank's mother know what she thought of her son.

"How in the dickens could she know my name?" muttered Frank to his chums, as they skated off, so as to leave the cheering crowd behind.

"Well," remarked Lanky, with a broad smile, "to tell the truth, Frank, you've been in the limelight so many times when playing on the teams of Columbia High that even the dogs around this

section of the country will wag their tails if you just say ' Frank Allen ' at them. Didn't you hear a lot of those children call you Frank,' as if you might have lived in Clifford always? It's a great thing to be famous!"

"Huh! One of you fellows must have gone back on me, and told," grunted Frank.

"Oh! all right," said Lanky; "only I was wondering what someone I know would have thought if they'd seen you being kissed that way in public!"

"Let up on it, I tell you, Lanky; you've been through the same experience, you may remember. Now, up here's where the Clifford hockey team do their practice, and I understand they expect to pull off the match game here to-morrow."

"Then we want to skate around, and get the lay of things down pat, you know," the tall chum remarked, with an eye to business. "If there's anything queer about this bit of ice we ought to find it out, so the game can be settled on its merits."

So they skated back and forth, viewing the stretch of ice from all angles. First one and then another called attention to certain things that might count as trifles, but in a close match even small items are worth considerable.

"If you asked me," Paul said, when they had finished their examination, and were ready to start off again, "I'd say it was well worth the time to

come up and take a look around. Besides, I'm afraid a little woman would be mourning the loss of her Willie if you hadn't taken that same notion, Frank."

"Oh! I'm thousand times glad we came," was all Frank would say.

He never mentioned the incident at home, and his folks only learned of what he had done when Mrs. Shaw came down in a buggy the following day and told Mrs. Allen how proud she should be of such a manly and resourceful son.

"Hold on," said Lanky, "I'd almost forgotten that I promised Paul to show him just where I saw that stranger. I can pick out the exact spot, and unless someone else has been along the river-bank since, you'll find his tracks there."

It turned out that someone else had been along—several persons, in fact; and while there were plenty of tracks no one could say just which had been made by the strange man whom Paul was having such difficulty in locating.

"Here are the marks of his hound, you see," said Lanky, pointing toward his feet.

Paul stared hard at these imprints. He looked as though half inclined to try to follow the dog's trail; but as the snow was very light, and in places the ground lay exposed on account of the wind

blowing what little snow had fallen, he concluded that this would not pay him.

Frank heard him sigh as he finally turned away. It was plain to be seen that Paul would have given much to come face to face with that stranger, so as to ask him point-blank whether he had or had not found the watch.

"Perhaps we'll be able to get track of him some way or other before long, Paul," he told the other, hoping to encourage him more or less, for he certainly took it hard, to have his father believe him careless, and not to be depended upon.

"Yes, but to-morrow the big game comes off, and I'd give a lot to be in my regular place," returned Paul, dejectedly.

"Perhaps the rest of us wouldn't put up the greatest shout you ever heard if we knew you were going to be in the line-up," declared Lanky.

At least it must have been some consolation to Paul to know that he was appreciated so thoroughly by his comrades.

CHAPTER XV

THE SECOND HOCKEY GAME

It was Clifford's turn to entertain.

From Columbia hundreds came by road, or else took advantage of the frozen river to skate the three miles.

As the ice was so much thicker after another week of freezing weather, there appeared to be no necessity for keeping the crowds on the banks. Of course the committee in charge of arrangements was expected to see that there was no interference with the players.

If there was not such a great outpouring as on the day at Columbia, that fact might be laid to other causes than lack of enthusiasm, for Clifford was a sport-loving little town. Few Bellport people would travel so far to witness a game when their own club had no particular interest in it.

Every student belonging to Columbia High was out to root for the colors. Herman Hooker and his cheer section were in evidence early in the afternoon, and it thrilled grown men to listen to the

school yell as sent forth from that trained body of rooters.

Rumors had commenced to circulate early. The most important, in the eyes of the faithful adherents of Columbia High, was connected with the reported illness of a member of the Clifford seven.

"They say it's Wentworth, the right wing, who's laid up with a bad cold, and can't play to-day," Buster Billings told Minnie Cuthbert as they skated slowly around, watching the arrival of the boys and girls from the home town.

Somehow Buster always hovered near Minnie on these festive occasions; perhaps it was because he secretly admired the pretty girl very much; or else it might be he knew she would never "josh" him as so many other would-be witty ones did.

"That would be a fine thing for our side!" Minnie exclaimed. "A substitute in place of Wentworth would even things up. With Paul gone from our line it seems as though Columbia were crippled."

"That's about it, Minnie," said Buster; "crippled, like a bird with a wounded wing—don't you see, Paul's our *left wing?*"

There was naturally considerable curiosity to know who would take the place of Wentworth. He had always been a reliable player, and much of the success of the Clifford team could be laid at the door of his snappy work.

When the Clifford players came swooping along in a body, with all the enthusiasm and confidence of recent victors who meant to make it "two straight," every eye was instantly focused on the group.

"They've got half a dozen substitutes, seems like," remarked Buster, "and maybe we'll not be able to pick out the man until the game's called."

Columbia was on hand, and looking steady enough to renew the confidence of their supporters.

"They may be beaten," said Jack Comfort, grimly, "but mark my words, it'll never be a Waterloo. No club ever gets into a panic with a fellow as cool and dashing as Frank Allen at its head. This promises to be a pretty game, fellows. Take my advice—keep your best cheering to the last!"

That was in the nature of a prophecy, and Jack was known to be a pretty shrewd judge of coming events. To his mind they always cast their shadows before, if only one knew enough to discover it.

So the word was passed along among the ranks of the Columbia backers that Jack Comfort had predicted a fierce fight, but a victory for their side. Somehow even that little grain of comfort—that use of Jack's name was a joke of Buster Billings—had its effect upon the boys and girls. They took renewed hope, and told each other that they could see the glow of victory in the face of Frank Allen.

Presently the word was given to line up.

"It's Joe Dooley!" flashed through the crowds.

Everybody may not have known Joe before, but from the minute he took his place as the Clifford right wing his name became as familiar as that of the President of the United States.

"What kind of a hockey player is he, Buster?" asked Minnie.

"Well, I never really saw him play in a match game," admitted the fat boy; "but of course I've asked all about the different subs. on Clifford's team; and from what I hear I reckon he's in the same class as our Hazen."

"Erratic, you mean, don't you, Buster?" continued Minnie, deeply interested; for Frank Allen was leading the Columbia seven to battle, and she did hate to see the home team's colors dragged in the dust—in fact, they used to say that Minnie and some of the other girls took it more to heart than Frank himself had been known to do.

"Yes, that's about what you could call Joe Dooley," Buster explained. "Sometimes he's a regular fiend of a player, and dazzles every one with his work; then all of a sudden he'll make a terrible blunder that costs his team the game."

"Thank you, Buster," she told him, with one of her sunny smiles, "somehow you've given me fresh hope. We're playing our fly-up-the-creek player

against theirs. And as Jack Comfort says, this is a Columbia day; so we'll expect that Joe, bless his heart, will manage to outplay our Hazen when it comes to making blunders."

"There they get busy, Minnie!"

Frank faced Coots again at the start. There was a furious scramble for the possession of the puck. As a rule Frank had managed to gain possession, but of course this could not always happen. Coots was a heady player, and as quick as a cat; so he managed to dash away with the rubber in front of him.

Lanky seized upon it by blocking a furious drive that, if successful, would have taken the bunch dangerously close to Columbia's goal. Loud shouts attested to the keen interest that was being felt in these swift plays. Indeed, such was the fair spirit of the crowd that Columbia backers were likely to applaud a clever Clifford service, though of course not with the vim they did one engineered by a fellow who wore the purple and gold colors of the home school.

It was seen early in the struggle that the players on both sides were putting forth every atom of energy they possessed. They played as Buster said, "like demons." There was a reason, plenty of them in fact, for this. Clifford wanted that game the worst kind, so as to clinch the championship for

that season. Columbia on the other hand had to have it, in order to square matters, and save her side from a shut-out.

When the battle had proceeded for some little time Clifford took a jump, and as Joe Dooley struck one of his favorite situations he fairly ran away with the puck, sending it whizzing home despite the frantic endeavor of Ralph Langworthy to baffle the stroke.

That was first blood for Clifford, and they looked as though they could do it again, if sublime confidence went for anything. Loud and long rang the applause, until the referee announced that it must cease or the game could not proceed, for the players could not hear his whistle, or his voice warning them against fouls and penalties.

Again the puck was in motion, with the young athletes circling and dashing up and down the river as though they possessed magic skates. Waving sticks and the inspiring sound of sharp runners cutting the ice were almost the only sounds heard.

Now and then a sharp cheer would burst out, or a rippling wave of applause run along the anxious throng; but as a rule the crowd remained still, as if holding themselves in for some supreme effort.

Then there was a furious rush. Hazen had got possession of the rubber and it was hoped that he could display some of his dazzling speed. There was

a hush as he went flashing along, chased by the Clifford players, and still managing to drive the puck ahead of him.

Then a wild shout burst forth.

"He's done it!"

"A goal for Columbia!"

"That evens the score! Oh, you Columbia!"

"Remember what Jack Comfort said, fellows, and save your breath for the wind-up!'

When the first half ended that was the score, one —one. But Frank Allen and his six backers had regained some of their former confidence. They had learned that the rival team was not invincible.

"Keep them from scoring again, and get a few yourselves, boys!" shouted Buster Billings through the megaphone, which he had borrowed from the cheer captain.

It was splendid advice, and no doubt would be taken to heart by every member of the team. If followed out it was bound to win games right along.

Starting the second half Frank set Lanky against Coots. It was a good move, for the tall player managed to get hold of the puck, and started it over the disputed course toward the enemy's goal. Back and forth the flame of battle raged, more fiercely than ever.

"They're evenly matched, and it's going to end in a tie!" cried Minnie, when she realized how the

time was passing, and that only a few more minutes remained before the referee must blow his whistle as a signal to cease.

"If Frank or Hazen could only get started again like they did before!" sighed Buster Billings.

Never was a wish granted more quickly. A shout went up.

"Hazen's got the puck! See him shoot it along, will you? Here's where we rub it into you good and hard, Clifford!"

"You do, eh?" jeered some devoted local rooter; "did you see that fumble Hazen made? He nearly fell all over himself, and there's our Coots got—by ginger! that was a smart dodge of Frank Allen! After him, you fellows! Cut him off! Wow! he's gone and smashed it into the net; but it was a foul! Coots is protesting, you see, don't you, everybody?"

Amidst the roar of voices the referee whistled that the second half was over, and that the game went to Columbia. Coots acted as though furious. He may have been honest in his belief that a foul had been committed, and some of the Clifford adherents were of the same opinion. The referee and umpires would not grant the protest, and a majority of the Clifford people were open in their declaration that their team had been clearly outplayed at the finish.

"All right," Coots was heard to say finally, as

the crowds gathered around the disputants, "we'll wait and rub it in good and hard the third game."

"Yes, by then Wentworth will be on deck, and it'll be a cinch for Clifford."

Frank was naturally well pleased with the result. He told his players that they had done handsomely, and the crowd cheered them to the echo; though first of all the Columbia seven had called for a vigorous three-times-three for their late gamey antagonists, as custom decrees.

Frank knew deep down in his own heart that if Wentworth came back in line, and Paul Bird was still absent from Columbia's side, the chances were very much against the down-river school. Still, he would not cross a bridge before he came to it, and there was some hope that in another week the lost watch might be found.

After all it enhanced the interest in the next game, to have this tie. No matter which side won eventually it would appear as though they had been up against a worthy antagonist, and that the games had not been all one-sided.

All the way down the river nothing could be heard but the shouts of happy Columbia students, big and little. The victory had given them more pleasure than even the near approach of Christmas could; for they were loyal rooters, one and all, and had the best interest of their school at heart.

CHAPTER XVI

FOLLOWING UP A CLUE

"PAUL, drop back a bit with me here. It might be I have some good news for you!"

When Lanky Wallace said this in a low tone to the boy who was skating in the crowd headed for the home town, Paul quickly fell out and joined his tall chum.

"What about, Lanky?" he asked, hastily, while his eyes glowed with eagerness; "oh! I hope you've struck a clue at last!"

"Well, that remains to be seen," was the other's cautious response. "I have learned that a man has rented the old Jones farm about five miles above Columbia. His name appears to be Ketcham, though the person I got my information from said no one seemed to know much about the man."

"Had he seen him?" demanded Paul.

"Well, this happens to be a woman," came the reply; "a Mrs. Jessup who lives not more'n a mile away from where Eli Jones had his place."

"Then did she see him, and could she tell you what he looked like?" pursued Paul.

"A woman is a mighty poor hand to describe anybody," said Lanky, with the loftiness of youth; "though she did tell me he was rather decent looking, and talked as though he might be a gentleman. You remember that man used pretty good language, and we decided he wasn't any hoosier or hayseed."

"Yes, yes, that's a fact, Lanky; but couldn't she tell you something about his looks? Did she know whether he had a smooth face, or wore a mustache?"

"I got her to thinking that part of it over, Paul. You understand, so as to let her see how very important it might be, I had to tell her all about your troubles; and she did just what you'd expect any woman to do—decided the case on her judgment of the man's manners, and not from the evidence. She says Mr. Ketcham couldn't possibly have taken the watch; that he was too much of a gentleman to do such a wicked thing."

"Yes, and about his face?" persisted Paul.

"Oh! she managed to remember he had a mustache," Lanky admitted, with a grin.

"A sort of gray one, wasn't it?" asked the other, breathlessly.

"Huh! Mrs. Jessup wasn't dead sure whether it was gray or not, but she did admit he seemed to be a man of about fifty years of age."

Paul seemed greatly encouraged. He insisted upon shaking the hand of his chum.

"You've given me great hopes, Lanky," he said with a little tremor in his voice; "and I hope it pans out all right. I've just got to go up there to that farm where old Eli Jones died months ago, and meet this Mr. Ketcham. Yes, and before I go to bed to-night, in the bargain."

"Whew! you do rush things, I must say. There's another day coming!"

"Yes, but I couldn't sleep a wink to-night until I tried to find out something," the other boy told him.

"On the whole I don't blame you much, either," continued Lanky, as though second thought showed him what this meant to Paul.

"If you had suffered all I have from losing your father's watch,—in mind, of course I mean," said Paul, "you'd want to fairly fly up there and interview the one man who might help you out."

"Well, I'm going along with you, remember."

"That's mighty nice of you."

"And what's more, we've got to let Frank know about it," continued the other. "He has taken such a deep interest in the whole thing I reckon he'd feel badly if you didn't give him a chance to join us."

"The more the merrier, I say!" Paul declared. Just then, with hope renewed, the boy looked more

like himself than had been the case ever since the accident to the bobsleds.

When the party reached town Frank caught a suggestive nod from Lanky, and hastened to join the pair.

"What have you fellows got up your sleeves?" he demanded, laughingly; "I've noticed that you hung back all the way home, and—say, what makes Paul look so pleased? Have you heard anything from—that watch?"

"Not exactly," returned Paul, "but Lanky has found a clue to the mysterious stranger who had that team. His name it seems is Ketcham, and he's rented the Jones farm, for some reason or other besides meaning to work it."

Frank gave a whistle, to declare his interest in the news.

"That sounds like something worth looking into," he said. "And what strikes me as queer is how it happens that we never got on the track of it before. This man Ketcham must keep himself away from every living soul around Columbia; which looks strange, I must say."

"Paul's bent on hurrying up there to see him after supper to-night, said Lanky, "and I promised to go along. We thought perhaps you'd like to know."

"And keep you company," Frank added quickly; "I certainly will. How shall we go?"

"I'll get a horse and buggy," Paul replied, as though he had already made up his mind.

"Well, as the Jones farm isn't very close to the river," said Frank, reflectively, "that might be the better way. We could skate up, and then tramp nearly a mile through the woods and around the swampy stretch; but after all the horse and buggy business would be easier."

"Then get around at my house as soon as you've had supper, both of you," urged the eager Paul.

When they parted it was with this understanding. Frank and Lanky walked together for a short distance.

"I hope it turns out all right, and Paul gets the watch back," remarked Lanky.

"The same with me," added Frank; "but we mustn't be too hopeful. Even if it was this Mr. Ketcham who picked the watch up, what would you think of a man who'd carry such a thing away, and never advertise it, or try to find the owner?"

Lanky had not considered this part of the puzzle.

"It does beat anything I ever heard," he confessed. "And if it turns out he's got that watch I'm wondering what sort of a man he can be. Perhaps he's some sort of crook from the city, who's been hunted high and low, and wants to hide up here.

That would explain why he keeps so much to himself."

"We'll understand more after we meet Mr. Ketcham," decided Frank, who did not like to judge people before he became acquainted with them.

Besides, he could not get it out of his mind that there had been something rather cheery and taking about the man with the team that had caused the upset of the bobsleds.

The boys came together according to their plan as soon after supper as possible. The game had taken place later in the afternoon than customary, owing to some delay in the arrival of the referee, so that the day was well spent when the Columbia rooters and players dribbled back to town in detachments.

"I've got the horse and buggy all ready," Paul told them.

"Then let's get started," urged Lanky, who never liked to delay more than necessary.

They were soon on the road. The moon was up just above the horizon, for now that it had passed its fullest stage it would appear later every night.

"Remember last Saturday night after the game, how we had that long and splendid skate up the river, in the light of the young moon," remarked Lanky, as the horse trotted along at quite a lively clip.

"Yes, the night was everything to be wished for," said Frank; "and the company, well, we know that had a heap to do with making it seem so fine to both of us, Lanky. But also remember what happened on the journey home."

"The wild dog pack! Wow! will I ever forget it when the moon's shining?" Lanky exclaimed. "But listen to how the hard crisp snow creaks under the wheels. I like to hear that sound; it's music to my ears, for I love the good old winter time.

"Look! there goes a rabbit jumping along the road!" cried Paul.

"They like to come out winter nights, for some reason or other," said Frank, "and that reminds me, Lanky, of what we said about taking our guns, and having a little hunt for the cottontails early next week."

"Count me in, too, boys," observed Paul; "you know I'm mighty fond of handling a gun, and that happens to be one enjoyment that hasn't been taken away from me."

Paul spoke a trifle bitterly. He was a boy, and perhaps could not just comprehend why he should be punished as he was, for his carelessness. There were other ways that might have been used to rub it in, besides forbidding him to play hockey.

"There goes another bunny, as sure as you live!" exclaimed Lanky; "why, the woods must be full

of them this year, and so far I haven't bothered going out. Call it Monday afternoon, if the weather is good, Frank."

"All right, Monday it is, then," the other affirmed. "And Paul, of course you know how to get in to this Jones place, which is away off the main road?"

"To tell you the honest truth," acknowledged the other, "I've never really been there, that I can remember; but I was told it lay back of the brickyards, and all of us know where they are."

"Yes, a wide creek runs up there from the river, and they float the bricks down on scows," remarked Frank. "I remember that a road passes there, and you say it runs to the Jones farm?"

"Fact is, the Jones place is the only one after the brickyard for six miles along that road, till it comes out on the main highway again."

"Whew! must be a spooky old place, I should say!" Lanky suggested.

"If any one wanted solitude he could find it there," laughed Frank.

"And by the same token, if he had any reason for wanting to hide, where could he find a better place?" the tall chum continued.

"You seem to have that notion firmly planted in your mind, Lanky," Frank told the other; "better wait till we meet Mr. Ketcham. He may turn out

to be another sort of party from what you're picturing."

"The road where we turn in ought to crop up soon," observed Paul, who was leaning forward in the buggy, being seated in the middle, and surveying the course ahead as seen in the misty moonlight, with the dark shadows crossing fantastically here and there.

"What ails the horse?" asked Frank, just then.

The animal had commenced to snort, and act a little strangely. In fact it appeared as though he had lost some of his ambition to go ahead.

"He scents something he doesn't like, seems to me," suggested Lanky. "I don't suppose any of those dogs could still be roaming around the country?"

"Not the slightest chance of such a thing," asserted Frank, decisively.

"I certainly saw something moving ahead there!" remarked Paul.

"Where? Show us, Paul! Oh! say, Frank, it's *white*, don't you see?" cried Lanky, in a sudden panic, though he could hardly be said to know what fear was.

"What of that?" asked Frank, composedly; "just because you happened to say that Jones place would be a good roost for spooks, you mustn't think

everything white you meet on the road is a real ghost!"

"There, it moved again; didn't you see it, boys? Whoa! Ben, behave yourself, you silly thing! There's nothing to hurt you!"

It was all very well to say that reassuringly to the trembling horse; but if the truth were told the hands that gripped the lines quivered also, and Lanky too was so excited that his teeth chattered as he spoke.

"Whatever it turns out to be, fellows," he said, "we're sure in for it; because the thing is advancing this way. It doesn't seem to walk, but just glides along; and the road's so pesky narrow we couldn't turn the rig even if we wanted to—which," he hastily added, "of course we don't. Frank, what do you think it can be?"

CHAPTER XVII

THE TRAIL HOUND

"WELL," said Frank, upon being thus appealed to, "one thing sure, if that is a ghost it's a female spook!"

Somehow either his words or the manner in which he spoke caused Lanky to laugh.

"You're right, Frank; it must be a woman, and she's waving her hand to us, I do believe. Maybe it's some harmless creature got away from the asylum."

"Keep still, Lanky, she's coming up to us. Quiet your horse, Paul!" Frank said, hastily.

It turned out to be a woman wearing some sort of light colored garment. No wonder seeing her moving in the wintry moonlight had given all of them a thrill.

She came close to the side of the buggy and seemed to be looking eagerly at all of the occupants of the crowded seat. Then Frank heard her sigh as if with disappointment.

"I was in hopes he might be in the buggy," she

said; "have any of you happened to see him along the road down to town?"

"Who?" asked Lanky, once more himself.

"Oliver Gardner, my poor old half-witted brother," came the reply.

Oh! why, it's Mrs. Edmondson!" exclaimed Lanky, recognizing the woman. "What happened to old Oliver; has he got lost?"

Mrs. Edmondson lived on a farm along the main road. Besides her husband she had a brother, a harmless elderly man who had once been a professor, and was now out of his mind.

"Yes, yes, it's this way," she hurriedly explained. "He sometimes goes over to a neighbor living a mile away from us. This afternoon he took a notion he wanted to visit them, for they are always so kind he likes them. That was the last we have seen of him."

"And it's a pretty raw night for any one afflicted as he is to be wandering around in the woods," remarked Frank, interested at once, and full of sympathy.

"I'm frightened about it," the woman went on, with a sob in her voice. "John, he's gone to try and get a dog that can follow the trail of a human being. We know about one that was fetched up from the South."

"Yes," Frank added, "they still use them down

below Mason and Dixon's line, not to pull down runaway slaves like they did long ago, but to follow up escaped convicts from the camps in the Flatwoods and the turpentine stills."

"When Oliver didn't come back late in the afternoon we got worried," the woman continued, "and John said he must go over and see if he was still at the neighbors'."

"Had he been there?" asked Frank.

"No, they hadn't seen him," she answered.

"Then he must have wandered away while heading there," Lanky remarked. "Something attracted his attention, and led him to quit the trail. Maybe it was a rabbit, and he got the notion he could capture it."

"He was very fond of pets," admitted the woman, "and it might be as you say. After John went off to try and get that hound I just couldn't stay home any longer. So I came along down the road, hoping I might run across Oliver."

"Will John come back to your house if he gets the dog?" asked Frank, seized with a desire to make himself useful if it could be done.

"Yes, and I was just going to turn around and go back when I heard wheels. My poor helpless brother, he will freeze to death before morning, because you see he's just like a little child, ever since his mind gave way from too much study."

Frank immediately jumped out of the buggy.

"Come along, Lanky," he said, "it'll do us a lot of good to stretch our legs a little. Let me help you in, Mrs. Edmondson. We're going back home with you, and see if we can help John find your brother."

"Bully stunt!" chuckled Lanky, who was never happier than when doing something for others; and while Paul might still be anxious to interview Mr. Ketcham, he was not blind to the fact that here was someone who suffered many times more than he.

The woman did not refuse the offered assistance. Indeed, the fact that she had chanced to come upon those who might help in the hunt for the missing man seemed to give her renewed hope.

Her house was not much more than half a mile above. Before they arrived near it Paul noticed a road leading off toward the distant river.

"If we followed that road would we come to the brickyards, Mrs. Edmondson?" he asked.

"Yes, it's the only way to get there with a team," she told him. "They send most of the bricks down the creek, which has been dredged out, to the river, and then on down by barges or canal-boats."

"And where is the farm that used to belong to Eli Jones?"

"I should say a mile or more further on."

"Do you happen to know if any one is living there now?"

"Why, seems to me I did hear someone say it had been taken, but if you want to find out who the tenant is I couldn't tell you a thing."

"Listen! isn't that a dog baying?" asked Lanky.

"It must be John coming back with Major Lee's hired man, and the hound," the woman explained. "You see, the Major is abroad just now. He had that dog sent up from Georgia, for some reason or other."

"I think I heard about how some such hound followed a couple of yeggmen's trail after they had broken into a house over toward Harvard, and helped the officers round the rascals up," Frank mentioned.

"It was the same dog," affirmed Mrs. Edmondson. "They do say he is a wonder at following a trail that isn't too old, if only you have something to let him smell first, something that belonged to the one that's lost."

"If your husband reaches home, and finds you away, he may be alarmed?" Frank remarked, as the hound still continued to bay not very far off.

"We are nearly there, and you can see that they haven't come along yet," she told him, confidently.

"Huh! we didn't expect to run up against anything like this when we started out to-night, did we, fellows?" ventured Lanky, who with Frank had

kept up a " dog-trot " so as to continue alongside the vehicle.

" It's the unexpected that often happens with us, nowadays," Frank told him.

" There's the house," said Mrs. Edmondson. " I left a lamp in the window, thinking that if poor Oliver did happen to wander back, he'd know it was home."

She jumped from the buggy and hastened into the small house, only to come out again a minute later looking very much disappointed.

" He didn't come! " she said, showing Frank how even that slight hope must have gripped her heart.

" There they come! " Lanky announced, and voices sounding along the road told that John had returned with the tracking hound, as well as the animal's keeper, Major Lee's man of all work.

At sight of the three lads John Edmondson, who was a large man, seemed considerably surprised. However he quickly recognized them, for he knew most of the people in Columbia, since he sold much of the produce he raised in that market.

" We were coming up here on another errand," Frank explained, " when we happened to meet your wife, and she told us about the old gentleman wandering off. So we thought we'd offer to help in any way we could."

" Now that's what I call fine of you, boys! " the

other declared, heartily, as he went around shaking hands. "But we've got this Southern hound that ought to turn the trick, if so be the trail ain't too cold, Simeon says. Ma! get one of Oliver's shoes, or any old thing he used to carry around. We'll let the dog sniff it."

Frank felt considerable interest in the dog. From what he had read he imagined that it must belong to the bloodhound family, being sturdy of build, dun-colored, and with heavy jaws that looked capable of holding on to anything they happened to grip, and large, drooping ears.

"He seems to know he's expected to get busy," said Lanky, as they watched the eager beast nosing around, and pulling savagely at his leash.

The man called Simeon, who was in the employ of Major Lee, was capable of managing the dog. He was a dark-featured man, and possibly he too had come from the South, where he may have had something to do with running down escaped convicts by means of just such hounds.

Mrs. Edmondson hurried indoors to carry out her part of the plan. Frank and his chums were anxious to ascertain how the idea would work. Paul had secured the horse to a hitching post, and thrown a blanket over his back, since they might not be able to return for one or more hours.

"We want to see it all through if we can, you

know," he told Frank, who had stepped up to help him fasten the straps of the horse blanket, so the standing animal might not be exposed to the freezing temperature.

The farmer's wife came out just then. She was carrying a pair of shoes, and some clothing besides, wishing to give the keen nose of the hound a fair chance.

"Will you let me go along with you, John?" she asked.

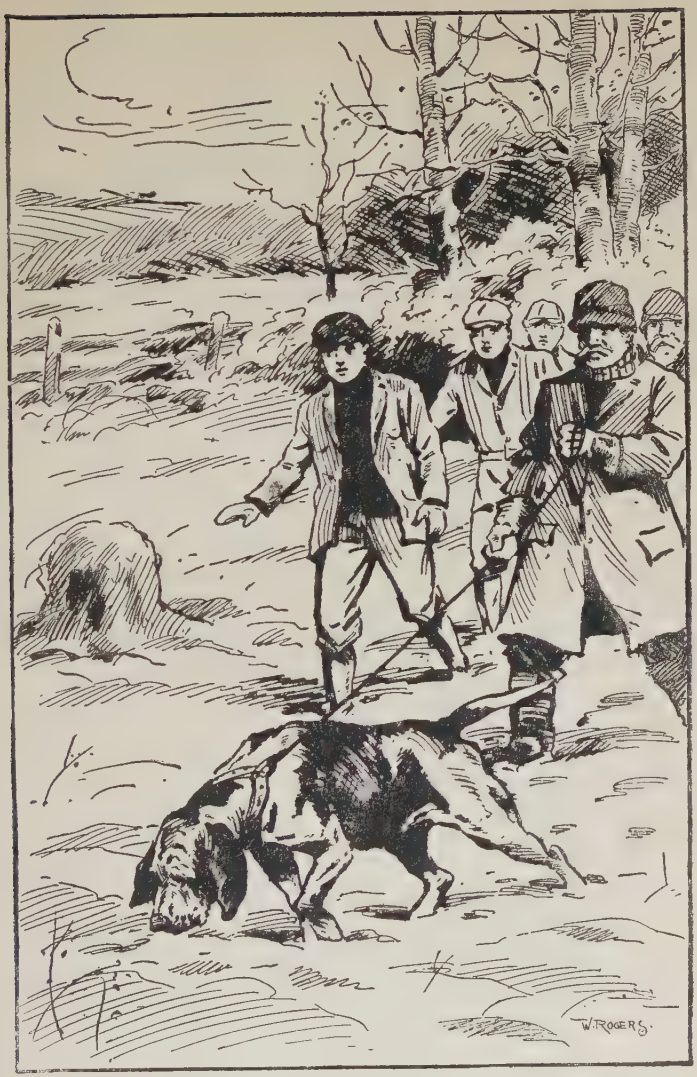
"No, you'd better stay here, and wait for us to fetch Oliver home," her husband told her; and then hastily added, to soften her disappointment, which he realized must be keen; "the poor old fellow will be hungry, so have something warm ready for us all."

"Yes, if you think it best," she told him.

Already Simeon had taken the shoes and clothes which belonged to the missing man. These he placed before the hound, at the same time talking to the beast after a certain fashion.

Greatly to the amusement of Lanky the dog began to howl dolefully. It sounded as though he might be trying to answer the keeper, and inform him that he stood ready to do his duty the best way he knew how.

John had meanwhile obtained a warm blanket,



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and Frank could guess what use he expected to put it to in case their quest turned out successfully.

The dog was now ranging back and forth, with his nose close to the ground. All at once he gave utterance to a peculiar bay, different from that which the boys had heard before.

"He's found the right trail!" exclaimed Paul, in great excitement.

"We're off!" announced Lanky, as the hound started away, with Simeon hanging to the leash.

"Oh! I shall pray that you find him, and all is well!" they heard Mrs. Edmondson say, as they hurried after the dog.

The first thing Frank noticed was that they did not keep to the road at all. A trail of some sort evidently led through the woods and over fields to the neighbor's place a mile distant, where Oliver Gardner, the one-time professor was in the habit of visiting.

"This sure is a remarkable happening for us, eh, Frank?" Lanky said, in a low tone, as with Paul they hurried along in the wake of the searching party.

"If we are only lucky enough to find the poor old chap," Paul remarked, "we'll all be glad of the chance to lend a hand. His sister feels it terribly; and she must think lots of Oliver. I remember him

a little. He is a mild mannered little old man, with the meekest eyes and a soft voice."

"We'll find him, never fear," declared Frank, "for that hound knows his business, let me tell you."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE LOST FOUND

They speedily lost sight of the house that had the lamp burning as a beacon in the window. There seemed to be a well-worn trail winding in and out, and it was easy to see that the Edmondsons and their mile-away neighbor often visited "across lots."

After they had been going along for a short time Frank noticed that Simeon had turned abruptly to one side.

"That must be where old Oliver left the trail, for some reason or other, and walked into the woods," Frank observed.

"And once he got off the beaten track," added Lanky, "he wouldn't know how to find it again."

"You heard what his sister said about his being as simple as a little child?" Frank continued. "Once he found that he was lost he would go wandering around without any particular object in view."

"He may have covered a number of miles, then?"

"I wouldn't be at all surprised."

They were now off the trail themselves, and pushing through the woods. The growth did not happen to be very dense, but all of the boys knew there were spots where the trees grew close enough to make it seem very dismal. Besides, there was the swampy section that would be a bad place for any one out of his mind, and absolutely helpless, to get into.

"I'd like to know whether the dog is following his tracks, or running a rabbit down!" muttered Lanky, presently.

"That part of it oughtn't to be hard to settle," Frank told him. "Let's catch up with Mr. Edmondson, and have him hold Simeon and the hound in while we go ahead and take a look."

When they mentioned the matter to the farmer he too considered that it was an idea well worth looking into.

"Hold up a minute or two, Simeon," he called out to the man who held the hound. "These lads want to take a look ahead, and see if the dog is really following the tracks of Oliver, or something else. It might be a good thing to make sure."

Apparently Simeon had no doubts himself. He grinned, and nodded his head, as much as to say that he would be willing to stake all he had on the dog's scent being absolutely correct.

Accordingly Frank hurried forward, with both his chums at his heels. It was noticeable that they

made a half-circuit, so as to keep beyond the range of the tawny hound. Lanky openly confessed that for one he did not feel like having that beast try his fangs on the calf of his leg.

It was not as light as Frank would have liked, so he drew out his matchsafe, always carried along with him, no matter where he went, and struck one.

Immediately Lanky, whose eyes could not be excelled, announced:

"Tracks here, all right, Frank!"

"Yes, and made by a small man in the bargain," added Paul, for it required very little knowledge of woodcraft to tell this.

"Only a single series of tracks, you notice," commented Frank, "and heading away from the regular trail we left behind us."

"Oh! that settles it!" asserted Lanky.

"The hound knows his business, all right!" Paul declared.

"I'm sure of one thing," said Frank, "if I'd done anything that was wrong, and hoped to make my escape through the wilderness, I'd certainly hate to have that beast cut free from his leash, and set on my trail."

When Simeon heard him say that he chuckled some more.

"That's right," he observed, and he must have been a man of few words, because as the boys after-

wards remembered, that was the sum total of his share in the conversation while the hunt was on.

"Then you're satisfied, are you, boys?" inquired Mr. Edmondson.

"We certainly are," was the reply.

"How much of a start has he got on us, Mr. Edmondson?" asked Frank, as they moved along through the woods, Simeon and the hound in front, then the farmer, and the trio of lads bringing up the rear.

"Do you mean what time it was when Oliver left home to visit our neighbors?" the farmer inquired.

"I forgot to ask your wife that, sir," Frank continued.

"Oh! somewhere around two o'clock, I reckon," came the answer. "It used to take him about half an hour to stroll over, because Oliver never walked fast. Then he'd visit an hour. They were always particular to start him home by half-past three."

"Whew! a long start, nearly five hours!" Lanky muttered.

"Oh! but you needn't think that he's been walking anything like all that time," Mr. Edmondson assured them. "He's weakly in body, as well as in mind, and would be apt to give out hours ago."

"Then we might expect to run across him any time?" Lanky inquired.

"I'm looking for it," the farmer replied.

"Now, if it was any ordinary person," advanced Lanky, thoughtfully, "we'd expect to find him squatting alongside a cozy blaze, toasting his feet, and waiting till the clouds rolled by."

"Oliver wouldn't know how to go about starting a fire, even if he carried matches," the farmer told him. "And we never let him do that, because he wasn't responsible. It's cold enough right now to nearly freeze him to death."

"Notice that the hound's changed his actions, boys!" exclaimed Frank.

"Would that indicate we're coming near the quarry?" asked Paul.

"I'd think so," Frank told him. Simeon doubtless heard what they were saying for he turned his head and gave it several vigorous nods.

"Simeon says it's so," remarked Lanky, "and Simeon ought to know."

Their interest increased, likewise their anxiety, for like Mr. Edmondson they feared that they might arrive too late, and that the poor old man would have already succumbed to the wintry weather.

The hound was tugging frantically at his leash, so that it was only by considerable effort that the man at the other end of the rope managed to hold him in check.

Suddenly they saw Simeon whip the rope around a stout young hickory sapling.

"Now what in the dickens did he do that for?" asked Lanky, astonished.

"I think he believes we do not need the services of the hound any longer," Frank explained; "you see he is beckoning to us to come with him."

"Cracky! but this does get mighty exciting, doesn't it, boys?" muttered Lanky, as with his two chums he pushed forward, again passing beyond the limits of the straining hound's leash.

Simeon was now pointing toward the ground.

"I see something there," said Paul.

"Say, Frank, he's dead, is he?" gasped Lanky, as he stared hard at the object that lay under the bushes.

"I believe he's taken off his overcoat, and pulled it over him, just as if he thought he was in his bed at home!" declared Mr. Edmondson.

That was exactly what the poor old man had done. They found him snuggled down under the coat, shivering as you may have seen a stray dog do when hungry and almost frozen.

The odd looking little old man opened his eyes, and looked up when Mr. Edmondson lifted the coat off. He evidently did not know what to make of it all, but there could be no mistaking that he felt his condition.

"P-p-pretty c-c-cold night, b-b-boys, isn't it?

G-g-guess Polly b-b-better give me s-s-some more bedclothes!"

At hearing him say this in a weak and trembling voice Mr. Edmondson laughed.

"I guess he's all right, and if some of you will start a fire going we'll soon warm him up, so he can be got home again."

He threw the blanket over the old man's shoulders, after making him put on his overcoat again. Then Mr. Edmondson sat there talking reassuringly to him while the three boys got a blaze going.

That was no difficult task for boys as accustomed to taking care of themselves as Frank Allen and his two chums. High leaped the cheery flames, and a genial warmth began to spread all around.

"Hey! I tell you that feels just fine even to a fellow as warm-blooded as I am!" Lanky said, as he held out his hands toward the fire. "What must it be to a poor old chap like that? How will you get him home, Mr. Edmondson?"

"Oh! that should be easy enough," he was told. "While we've followed his trail for perhaps as much as three miles, we're really less than a mile away from my house. When he's been warmed up we can help him walk that far. The wife will be ready to give him a hot meal."

"If that's the case," said Frank, "we'd better

wait and go with you. It might save us time in the end. What do you say, boys?"

"I agree with you," Lanky confessed; "because I'm not hankering to get lost up here, and put in the night wandering around, or sitting by a fire with my hands about my knees."

The heat of the fire soon thawed old Oliver out. He was as voluble as a child free from care. No one would believe he had escaped being frozen to death by almost a miracle.

After a little while the farmer announced that they could now start for his house. Frank extinguished the last of the fire with some snow. There was little danger of it spreading, but he had learned this habit long before, and it was second nature for him to make absolutely certain that he had left no red coals behind to be wafted by a shift of wind into a pile of dead leaves.

Frank noticed that Mr. Edmondson kept talking with the old man every step of the way. He understood why this was done, for when interested in conversation the wearied man was apt to forget his fatigue, and keep walking right along.

In due time they saw the light in the window, and at the sound of John's shout Mrs. Edmondson came hurrying out, to throw her arms around the small figure of her brother.

"Don't bother so much, Polly," he whimpered,

trying to unclasp her sisterly arms, "John says you've got supper ready. I'm hungry, Polly, fearfully hungry—you hear?"

"Fetch him right in, John," she told her husband; "and if these boys will only stop with us a bit I'd like them to take some warm supper too; likewise Simeon Bradshaw."

"That's very nice of you, Mrs. Edmondson," said Frank, smiling; "but none of us happens to be hungry just now. And as to what we've done, it was only a pleasure to us."

"Yes," added Lanky, "we're very glad you've got him back again safe and sound, and we hope he'll never lose himself again, especially in winter time."

"I'll make sure he never has the chance," she declared, firmly; "because when any one isn't responsible in his mind, he shouldn't be allowed to get out of sight. Good-night boys, and we're a thousand times obliged to you."

The farmer came out with them to unhitch the waiting horse, and shake hands all around once more. When the three boys drove back toward the side road they were unanimously of the opinion that the time they had spent in helping to find the old gentleman had been put to good advantage.

CHAPTER XIX

THE MAN WITH THE LANTERN

"After all we didn't get to the old Jones farm as soon as we expected," remarked Lanky, as they turned into the side road.

"Oh! well, none of us feel sorry about that, I reckon," Paul affirmed, stoutly.

"Glad to hear you say that," put in Frank, quickly; "because you're the only one who was anxious to arrive."

"But searching for old Oliver Gardner was an experience worth while," Paul told them, "and one I wouldn't have missed for a whole lot."

"Let me tell you that hound is a good one," declared Lanky, who had a great liking for dogs—with possibly the exception of wild ones.

"He followed the trail perfectly," Frank continued, "and took us direct to where the poor old man was lying. It gave me a queer feeling when he piped up in his little thin voice, to say he was cold, and guessed he'd have to ask Polly for more bedclothes."

"Just the same way with me," said Lanky. "I

wanted to laugh, and yet I felt the tears in my eyes."

"He'd have frozen stiff long before morning if we hadn't come along!" declared Paul, "and for that if nothing more I'm glad we had the chance to lend a helping hand."

"This road is as quiet as a graveyard," Lanky observed, a little while later.

"It's used mighty little, except by a few wagons hauling bricks," explained the leader of the chums. "You know we've been told that outside the Jones place, which has been shut up for some time now, there isn't another house for miles."

"I think I see the brickyards ahead of us," announced Lanky.

"About time we reached them," Paul observed, for no doubt he had begun to think it was rather a long stretch between the main road and the open place at which the brick sheds stood.

It proved just as Lanky had said, for in a couple of minutes they found themselves passing the queer looking row of shacks which covered the pyramids of building material, and under which the tens of thousands of bricks were fired in the fall, so as to harden and color them for the market.

Paul, knowing that another mile or so remained before they could hope to reach the Jones place, urged the horse on at a faster pace.

"I hear dogs barking!" announced Lanky, suddenly.

"Just what I was going to remark," added Frank.

"Ahead of us, in the bargain," the tall boy continued.

"I don't suppose there's any way of telling what *sort* of dogs they are?" suggested the driver, as though he had some thought in his mind.

"I may be dull to-night, Paul," laughed Lanky; "but I'll have to ask you what difference that would make whether they were St. Bernards, mastiffs, Siberian-wolf-hounds, or plain every-day mongrels?"

"Why, don't you see," explained the other, "you told us that man had a hunting dog along with him."

"So he did, and there may have been two, for all I know," Lanky hastened to admit; "and now I get on to what you meant, Paul."

"If these dogs turned out to be rabbit trackers then we'd know that Mr. Ketcham must be the man you saw with a gun, and the same who made us have that upset."

"If it's worth anything to you, Paul," interposed Frank, "I'd like to mention that those dogs bark more like hounds than mastiffs, or Newfoundlands."

"You're right there, Frank!" Lanky added.

"We'll soon know, one way or another," Paul muttered.

It was plain to be seen that he was getting nervous as the critical time drew nearer. In pondering over the many things that he might want to say when he found himself face to face with the suspected man, Paul had of course built numerous castles in the air. He now dreaded lest these should come tumbling down about his ears.

"There you are!" cried Lanky, abruptly.

"A light moving along; must be a lantern someone is carrying," Frank added.

"Maybe he's been out to the stable to look after the horses; or else the barking of the dogs has bothered him," Lanky hazarded.

"I can see other lights, and they seem to shine from windows, which proves we are getting close to a house," observed Frank.

"There, the lantern is held still now, fellows!" Lanky exclaimed.

"It may be he's heard us talking, and wonders who can be coming along this deserted old road on a winter's night."

"I'll go you one better, Paul," said Frank, "and say that it's more likely he's heard the creaking of the wheels in the hard snow. They make enough noise to carry a good way off."

All three waited with more or less eagerness as

they continued to approach the spot where that stationary light shone. They soon saw that their surmise with regard to its being a lantern held in the hand of a man was the truth.

Paul drove straight toward the man. This brought him alongside the dilapidated fence that had once separated the road from the dooryard of the farmhouse. The man was leaning upon a few of the remaining pickets, evidently waiting for them to come up.

Frank heard Paul give a grunt which he knew signified disappointment. He could readily understand what caused this feeling. The man with the lantern was short of stature; while the stranger who had been the cause of the accident on the coasting hillside had been tall, and stoutly built.

If this turned out to be the Mr. Ketcham who had rented the old Jones farm for some mysterious purpose, then the game was all up, so far as Paul's quest went. This conviction was what was giving Paul a chilly feeling. Defeat already stared him in the face.

Frank was one of those fellows who never allow themselves to feel disheartened. In the expressive language of Lanky, Frank refused to ever get "cold feet."

Seeing that Paul was too broken up to undertake

engineering things, Frank took it upon himself to assume the role of interviewer.

"Good evening, sir!" he said, politely, as the rig came to a stop close to the man leaning on the fence.

The other had raised his lantern. He seemed rather curious to ascertain who was in the buggy, for the moom did not wholly answer the purpose. Perhaps he had some reason for wanting to learn facts like this, Frank thought, for no one understood as yet just why the abandoned Jones farm had been rented.

"Good-evening, boys!" replied the man, evidently having discovered that after all the buggy contained three lads, and not police officers. "It's some surprising to see a carriage come along here. Might be you've lost your way. I don't see any guns in your buggy, or I might think you were out hunting."

"We are," remarked Frank, quickly; "but not for fur or feathers. We're trying to locate a party by the name of Ketcham. Could you direct us to where we could find him?"

Paul gasped. He heard the man laugh softly. At least he gave no signs of being alarmed, though he certainly must feel curious to know what their errand might be.

"Certainly I can, boys," the other remarked; "you've come to the right place."

"Then you're Mr. Ketcham, I take it?" asked Frank, in his straight-from-the-shoulder fashion, while Paul held his breath, waiting to catch the reply.

"Oh! you're mistaken there; I'm only Darby, his man!"

"But Mr. Ketcham is the one who has taken the Jones place here, isn't he?" continued Frank, himself greatly relieved, while he knew Paul must be breathing freely once more.

"Yes, he's leased the whole farm for a while," replied the man with the lantern.

"We've come all the way from Columbia tonight to see Mr. Ketcham," continued Frank, earnestly.

"I'm sorry for that, boys; you've had your trip for nothing, unless I could help you out some way," the other told them.

"Is Mr. Ketcham sick, or away, then?" demanded Paul, in a disappointed tone.

"He had to run down to the city this morning," came the reply. "He took it very hard too, because he didn't want to go at all."

"How long will he be gone, do you think?" was the next question, Frank wishing to keep Paul from feeling too dejected.

"I really couldn't say," Darby told them. "He didn't know himself, but said not to expect him till

I saw him. He might get back in one day, and then again things might come up to keep him away for half the week. You must come up again and see Mr. Ketcham, if you have any business with him."

"We sure will," said Paul, and his manner told Frank that he was just as determined about interviewing the mysterious stranger as ever.

Of course Darby must have wondered who these three lads were, and for what they wanted to see his master. Even though there were no cause for secrecy their coming at such a queer hour of the night would mystify any one. Frank, however, did not think it good policy to drop even the slightest hint concerning the missing watch, and Paul's desire to get track of it. That would only be showing the cards in their hand, and putting Mr. Ketcham on his guard, if he did happen to be guilty.

"Well, there's no use waiting up here, boys," he remarked to his chums, and then once more turning to Darby he continued: "By the way, Mr. Ketcham is fond of hunting, I believe? One of my friends here saw him with his dogs and gun along the river bank."

Darby hesitated a little before replying. No doubt he was wondering whether it could be possible that these boys were trying to pick up some information connected with illegal shooting, or something of that kind. But when he spoke again it was

with seeming frankness, as though he knew of nothing to conceal.

"Yes, he likes to hunt, and keeps two rabbit dogs here that a friend loaned him. They took the first prize at a dog show last year, I'm told. Besides, it keeps Mr. Ketcham in the open air a lot of the time, and that's what he wants."

"Well, good-evening, Mr. Darby; we'll try and get up here again when Mr. Ketcham happens to be at home."

When Frank said this Paul turned the horse. Then they started over the back track, while Mr. Darby headed for the house.

"Do you think he was telling us the truth?" asked Paul, as soon as they were beyond earshot.

"That's hard to say," Frank answered, slowly, as though he might be weighing all the evidence. "He seemed to speak frankly, as an honest man would; and yet you never can tell."

"I'll make sure to come up this way again, and keep on coming until I meet Mr. Ketcham," declared Paul, between his set teeth.

"If we start out Monday to have that little rabbit hunt," suggested Frank, "we might make it a point to wander over this way from the river, and take another look-in on the Jones farm."

"I think that's a good idea," assented Paul.

"Listen," interrupted Lanky, mysteriously, "you

saw me twist around, and look back after we'd left him, didn't you, fellows? Well, our friend Mr. Darby wasn't all alone in that farmhouse, let me tell you."

"What makes you say that, Lanky?" asked Frank.

"I saw a shadow on the window shade!" asserted the other, promptly. "They did say that spooks could be looked for at the Jones farmhouse, but then ghosts never cast a shadow, you see."

"Was it a man or a woman, do you think?" continued Frank.

Lanky gave a grunt.

"There you go, Frank, always taking the wind out of my sails when I reckon I've got hold of something worth while. Now that I think of it again, it might have been a shadow of the female type, after all."

"Well, that isn't strange, is it?" Frank asked him. "You wouldn't suppose two men like Darby and his master would come up here, to stay for an indefinite time, and not have somebody along to cook for them, and be housekeeper. Perhaps Mr. Ketcham is married. We don't know a thing about him. Then again that may have been Darby's wife, who's serving as housekeeper. But it wasn't Ketcham, anyhow."

"I don't know what to believe," admitted Paul, "and it galls me to think that our trip up here has all been for nothing."

"Don't say that, Paul," urged Frank, "remember old Oliver Gardner. We ought to be glad we had a chance to take part in his finding."

"So we had, Frank, and I'm sorry I said what I did. After all, it may come out for the best. I'll likely meet Mr. Ketcham before the end of next week, and that would be plenty of time for the third hockey match."

"There goes another rabbit!" exclaimed Lanky. "Cracky! how thick they seem to be around here. Perhaps this Mr. Ketcham is a professional hunter, and ships his game down to clubs in the city, so as to make a nice little sum."

This idea seemed so far-fetched that even Paul laughed.

"If a gentleman had to depend for his living on what he'd get for rabbits at a quarter apiece," Frank announced, "I'm afraid his bill of fare would be pretty limited. He'd have to fall back on eating his game most of the time."

As they continued on their way back towards town they exchanged all manner of opinions. By degrees Paul got over his disappointment. What he said at parting, however, convinced Frank that his mind was set as much as ever on meeting the man whom he believed could solve the mystery of the missing watch.

"Monday afternoon then, remember, boys, we are going to have that little hunt!"

CHAPTER XX

RABBIT HUNTING

No doubt the hours dragged terribly to Paul Bird that following Monday morning. He must have allowed himself to indulge in fresh hopes connected with the anticipated meeting with Mr. Ketcham, and that before another night came the mystery of the lost watch might be cleared up.

As all the boys were taking a special course at school this year, the better to prepare for entering college, it was not absolutely necessary for them to spend more than an hour or two a day in the building. They were expected to do considerable studying at home, either during the balance of the day or evenings.

This made it very nice whenever they had anything arranged like the little rabbit-hunting trip.

By half after one then, the three met by appointment down at the riverside. All carried shotguns, and were dressed for the sport, with khaki hunting coats that bore evidences of considerable use, belts

containing a good supply of shells, and wearing leggings above their stout shoes.

The day had turned out somewhat cloudy, with indications of possible snow before a great many hours.

"I'll hate to see it drop down on us," remarked Frank, as they sat down on a bench to adjust their skates; "more on account of that third game than anything else. But even if it's postponed we'll find a chance to play the tie off later."

"The only consolation I'd have," said Paul, gloomily, "would be a little more chance to get back in line, and be allowed to play hockey again."

"Even if the watch isn't recovered," suggested Lanky, "your dad might relent as time goes by, and think you'd been punished enough."

But Paul shook his head in the negative, and the smile that came over his boyish face was whimsical if rather sad.

"Which shows that you don't know my father as well as I do, Lanky," he remarked. "What he says goes; and he plainly told me I shouldn't play hockey with the team again this whole winter, if his watch wasn't found. I have only one hope, and that is in recovering the watch."

The skating was still very good, as there had been no thaw of any consequence to spoil it, nor had any moist snow fallen during these two weeks.

What little they had had was so dry that it had been blown off the ice in most places, leaving the field open, and in fine condition.

The boys had a couple of dogs along. One of these Frank owned, a hound especially trained to hunt rabbits; while the other was a sort of mongrel that Lanky had acquired, and which he understood would turn out ten times better than his looks indicated.

"I'm curious to see how he works," he told his chums, as they struck out in the direction of Clifford.

"You say you got him from Bart Hodge, the man over at the ironworks?" questioned Paul, trying to conceal a smile, for to tell the truth he did not have much faith in the homely little beast.

"Yes, and I take a lot of stock in what Bart says," protested Lanky. "He wanted to give me something to remember him by, because my folks were pretty good to Bart's family when he was down sick. They've left town, you know: Bart got a better position in Hastings. Well, he gave me his dog, and that's what he said about him."

"All right," Frank declared, "we'll soon find out if he's good for anything. My hound can follow up rabbits, and sometimes fetch them around to where I'm waiting. If the yellow dog can do that much he's worth having."

They soon reached and passed Clifford. It was very quiet around the river up in that quarter, because most of the young people were still in school. Later on in the day things would warm up, and the river look lively enough, no doubt.

"Seems to me we visit up this way considerable," remarked Lanky.

"But not half often enough for some people," hinted Frank, at which thrust the tall chum laughed good-naturedly.

"Oh! well, that depends," he said. "It's worth while coming when you can make yourself useful as well as ornamental. Think of the numerous times we've done things when we've been up this same river."

"Saved the Baxter house when it was afire, for one," Frank mentioned.

"Rid the farmers of that big dog that was leading the wild pack, for another," Lanky added. Then Paul also felt impelled to lengthen the list.

"Yes, and helped locate a poor old man who had lost his mind, and might have been frozen to death in the woods only for our assisting Mr. Edmondson and Simeon to find him."

"There was another errand we had up here that no one's yet thought to mention," Frank chuckled, "and yet which added a heap to the joy of Columbia last Saturday night."

"Sure thing," exclaimed Lanky; "meaning the beating we gave Clifford High in the hockey game. That was a *glorious* errand; and here's hoping we can repeat the dose next time."

Shortly afterwards Frank announced that they might as well take off their skates, and get busy, since they had reached hunting ground.

He and Lanky had to call or whistle to the two ranging dogs from time to time; but when out after rabbits a wide sweep is allowed to the animals. In bird hunting the man with the gun has to draw up on the game concealed in the covert, and so dogs are trained to point and remain mute.

A rabbit dog on the other hand scours the surrounding country, and when he starts up a "cottontail" breaks into a series of excited yaps, and chases headlong after the jumping bunny. By circling around the dog manages to head the game toward the spot where he knows his master is waiting to shoot.

They were soon moving through the woods and fields, with the dogs eagerly dashing into every piece of brush, and nosing around under fallen trees.

"They've started one!" exclaimed Paul, as a clamor suddenly arose on the right.

"That's my hound!" asserted Frank, promptly,

with a smile toward Lanky, as if to invite him to take notice how a *real* rabbit dog acted.

"Well, my Bennie has started another over there on the left!" asserted the tall boy, as a terrible commotion broke upon their hearing.

"Both of them are heading away from us!" remarked Paul, in a disappointed tone.

"Just wait, and you'll see how my trained hound will turn his rabbit this way. We must keep on the watch," Frank asserted, confidently.

A few minutes passed. The noise of the pursuit had grown more distant; then Paul noticed that it had become clearer again.

"One is coming this way, as sure as anything!" he commented.

Lanky chuckling, said:

"From the awful racket I rather guess that must be the yellow cur, Bennie; and if you look sharp you'll see the cottontail jump out any second now!"

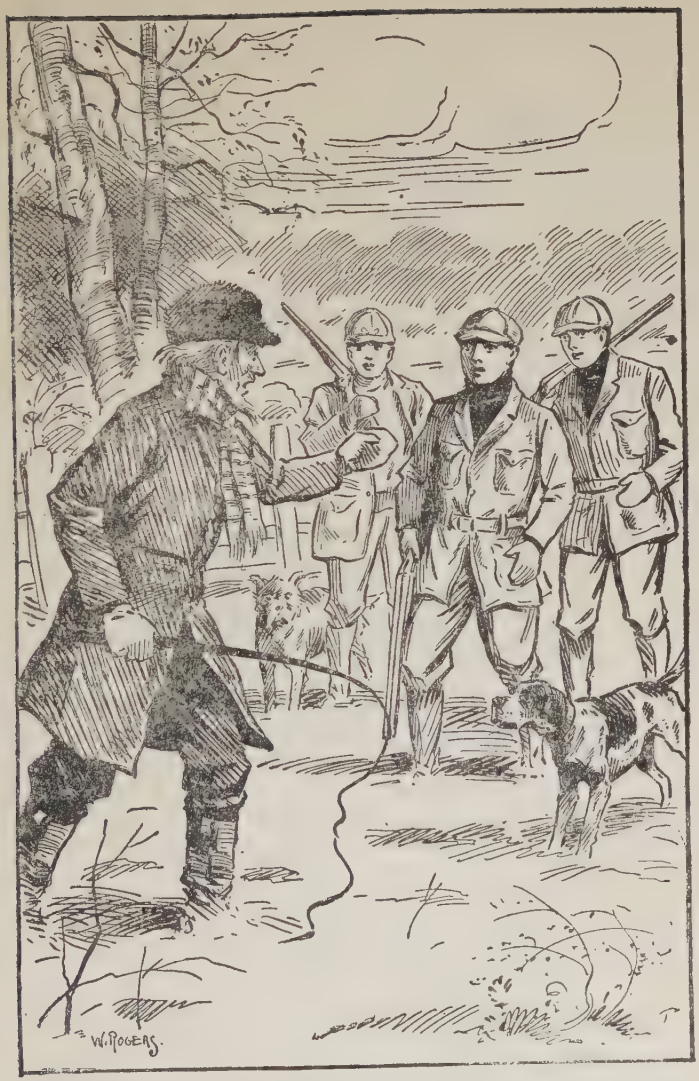
He had hardly spoken when Paul uttered a cry.

"There he is now, Lanky!"

"You knock him over, Paul; quick now!" cried the tall boy, generously.

Paul did not wait to be told twice. He threw his gun to his shoulder, and with the report they saw the rabbit plunge headlong.

"Well done, Paul; go get your game!" said Frank.



THEY WERE SUDDENLY CONFRONTED BY AN IRATE LOOKING FARMER.—*Page* 187.

Boys of Columbia High in Winter Sports.

The little yellow cur came running up, to be patted on the head by his new master, and spoken kindly to before being sent out again.

"Talk to me about an intelligent dog," said Lanky, proudly, "Bennie knows he's done his duty, and wants to hear me say so. There he's ranging again. And Frank, I guess your hound must have lost his rabbit, because he's hunting once more nearby."

Frank laughed.

"The old story over again, boys," he told them, "about the city sport with his fly-rod and fancy tackle, getting no trout; and the country boy with a big string that he caught with only a pin hook, and worms, and a hickory pole. But Jock can do better than that. He'll redeem himself, you'll see."

Frank soon had occasion to see his faith justified, for Jock got up another rabbit which was turned all right, and fell before the gun of his master.

So the sport went on—at least it was sport to the boys, if not to the rabbits that would later on adorn several dinner tables in Columbia in the form of appetizing stews.

They had bagged six, when in crossing a field they were suddenly confronted by an irate looking farmer, who carried a black whip in his hand.

"Whew! what's all this mean?" Lanky observed, as the man strode toward them, and snapped

his whip as though very much tempted to make use of it.

"We must be on his land, and he's got it posted, though we didn't see any signs as we came along. I'm sorry," Frank was saying, for he was not pugnacious by nature like the tall boy, though able to take care of himself under any and all conditions.

"I hope he doesn't mean to use that whip!" ventured Paul, uneasily.

"Well, if he knows what's good for him he won't," said Lanky, grimly.

The angry farmer now came up.

"I want to know what you boys mean by shooting over this farm?" he demanded. "It's posted all over, and the shooting privileges have been sold to a gentleman. I agreed to keep trespassers off the land. I—I feel like doin' something wicked right here and now. Anyway I'll have the law on ye for trespassing, see if I don't."

Lanky, had it been left to him, would probably have replied in some fashion calculated to anger the farmer more than ever, instead of soothing him. Frank was wiser than that.

"I'm sorry that we didn't happen to see any signs, Mr. Haverstraw," he said; "and we'll get right off your land if you say so."

At the mention of his name the man looked more closely at Frank, whom he doubtless had failed to

recognize because of the heavy corduroy hunting cap with its flapping ear tabs. It was marvelous to see the change that took place in his manner.

"Oh! is it you, Frank Allen?" he exclaimed, in a confused way. "I wouldn't have said what I did if I'd recognized you. I have let out the shooting privilege on my two-hundred-acre farm to a Mr. Ketcham; but then this once won't matter much, and you go right on. Your father has done too much for me to deny his boy anything."

"There!" said Lanky, "see what it stands by a fellow to have a dad he can be proud of. I was mighty afraid you meant to give us trouble, Mister: but now, we can breathe easy again."

"You said you'd rented out to Mr. Ketcham, didn't you?" asked Paul, eagerly.

"Yes, a gentleman who's taken the old Jones farm for the winter. He's pretty easy to get on with, and good-natured, so p'raps he wouldn't be very much put out if I told him I'd let some boys have a turn through the place."

"Then of course you know this Mr. Ketcham?" continued Paul, once more upon his favorite subject.

"I've met him a number of times," admitted the farmer. "He supplies my folks with all the game we can make way with."

"Then he isn't a pot-hunter or a market hunter," said Lanky.

The farmer hardly knew whether the boy meant this for a joke, or said it in earnest. He presently laughed as though amused.

"That's something I'd just like you to ask the gentleman himself," he told them, "and by the same token your chance to do that same has bobbed up, right away, for there comes Mr. Ketcham and his dogs this very minute!"

CHAPTER XXI

FACE TO FACE WITH MR. KETCHAM

When Farmer Haverstraw made that remark the eyes of the three young hunters followed the direction of his pointing finger. Some little distance away they saw approaching a large man clad in corduroy hunting togs. A couple of hounds were ranging the brush nearby, and even as the boys looked one of them started a rabbit.

They saw the man throw up his gun, and then shoot once, twice.

"He got him!" said Lanky; "but it took both barrels to do the trick, and that's not been the case with any of us so far to-day. But all our shots may have been easy."

"So that's Mr. Ketcham, is it?" Paul muttered, as he watched the man walk forward and take the rabbit from the dog that obediently retrieved it.

"We won't let him get away from us this time, Paul," Frank assured the other; for he knew that Paul must be trembling with eagerness.

Mr. Ketcham headed straight toward them. He may have wondered what a party of hunters could

be doing there, after he had been to the expense of renting the shooting privileges of the Haverstraw farm.

However, Frank noticed with satisfaction, the gentleman did not seem to be much concerned. Indeed, he was smiling as he came up.

"I'm not an accurate shot, I must confess, Mr. Haverstraw," he said as he drew near. "Sometimes I get them with the first barrel; but when the ground or the brush interferes it needs the second; and there have been times when I've let bunny get clean away."

He looked toward the boys as though not understanding what their presence signified. Frank was not surprised that he did not know any of them; for on that other occasion he had seen the boys only for a few minutes, and covered with snow at that.

"These boys got on my grounds by mistake, Mr. Ketcham," explained the farmer. "I was telling them I didn't think you'd care much if I let them go over some of the farm and pick up a few more rabbits; they're so plenty this season, you know."

"Are you Mr. Ketcham, sir?" asked Paul, trying to keep from betraying his nervousness.

"Yes, that's my name—Lawrence Clayborne Ketcham," replied the gentleman, as frankly as though he saw no reason to deny his identity.

Paul wanted to keep on, but somehow he could

not think what he ought to say next. So he sent a wireless appeal for help towards Frank, who immediately took up the business.

"You don't remember meeting any of us, before, Mr. Ketcham?" he remarked.

"Well, somehow your faces look a little familiar to me," came the reply; "but at that I don't seem to be able to place you."

"We were on those bobs that turned over on the coasting hill that afternoon when you started up it with your team, sir!" said Frank.

Mr. Ketcham laughed.

"I think I apologized at the time," he returned, "and I've often felt sorry since for interfering with your sport. If I can make amends by allowing you to hunt over this, or the Jones farm, allow me to do so."

That sounded very hearty, and Frank believed he would not give offense to such a broad-minded man if he explained the situation. It must be done, for there was Paul listening eagerly, and doubtless hoping that Mr. Ketcham would immediately pull out the lost timepiece and restore it with suitable apologies.

"That isn't why my friend, Paul Bird here, has wanted to see you, Mr. Ketcham," Frank continued. "The fact of the matter is, when he turned over in the snow that day he lost out of his pocket his

father's gold watch, which he was taking to the jeweler to have fixed."

Mr. Ketcham turned a little red, and then smiled.

"Oh! and so he thought I might have seen something of it, because I fussed about and tried to help you boys right things again?" he remarked. "Well, after all, what would be more natural, seeing that I was an utter stranger to you. Couldn't you get a trace of it in the snow, boys?"

"We hunted every inch of that place over and over, sir, but couldn't find the watch," Frank told him. "And what made it harder still, Paul's father, to punish him for his carelessness, has forbidden him from playing on our hockey team again this winter, unless the watch is found. And because of that we lost our first match."

Mr. Ketcham immediately looked serious. As he had told the boys on that other occasion he could never forget that he himself had been a lad, fond of outdoor sport, and hence could sympathize with them.

"Now, that's really too bad!" he declared, "and I'm sorry it all had to come through my carelessness in trying to climb that icy hill with my team. I should have known better. But unfortunately, boys, I'm a wealthy man, and I've got all the watches I can handle. In fact, I'm a wholesale jeweler in Maiden Lane, New York City, though about to give

up business on account of a breakdown in my health."

Of course Paul was bitterly disappointed. This left the mystery as dark as ever; in fact, much worse, because now they did not have a solitary clue to work upon.

"That's the reason you've taken the Jones farm, then, I suppose?" remarked Frank more to have something to say, so that the gentleman might not notice how hard Paul was taking the blow.

"Yes, my doctor said I must keep away from society all I could, and get in the open air every day," explained Mr. Ketcham. "So with my faithful handy-man, Darby, and his good wife, who plays the part of cook and housekeeper combined, I'm slowly rounding up. My nerves are much better, and I think I shall be recovered completely by Spring."

"I hope you won't think badly of us for wanting to see you, Mr. Ketcham," said Paul, rousing himself. "I've felt the loss of that watch terribly. I've had a lesson I'll never forget, too. But not to be able to play in the third and last game of hockey is going to make me feel sick, I tell you."

"I'm very sorry for you, Paul," said the gentleman, in a voice that told he meant it; "but if you've really searched every bit of that tumbled snow drift without getting a trace of the watch it looks as if

somebody must have picked it up, doesn't it. By Jove! now, I wonder?"

The way he said that last gave both Paul and Frank an idea something must have suddenly flashed across his mind.

"You've thought of something, sir?" ventured Frank.

"Strange that I didn't remember it at once when you spoke of your loss," Mr. Ketcham continued, smilingly; "which shows that I'm getting old, and my memory is playing me sad tricks, as the doctor told me it would if I didn't get out of the harness. Yes, perhaps now, after all I may be in a position to assist you to find your watch, because I certainly saw a boy stoop and pick something up. When I looked again he was hurrying away; but of course at the time I didn't think that anything strange."

"A boy, you say, Mr. Ketcham?" asked Frank.

"Could you describe him in some way, sir?" questioned Paul, drawing a big breath.

"Why, let me see," replied the other, half closing his eyes as he endeavored to draw upon his memory; "he was a heavy-set boy, with red hair, and his face was covered with freckles. Yes, that's as fair a description of him as I could give you off-hand."

The three looked at each other, and nodded their heads.

"Say, we ought to know who that boy is, hadn't we?" demanded Lanky.

"Tiff Bradbury!" declared Paul, showing signs of great satisfaction.

"The very fellow," added Frank, positively; "there can be no mistake about it."

"He was there, all right, because I saw him!" asserted Paul.

"And Tiff was on the list I had of suspicious fellows who pretended to help us hunt. I just remembered seeing him, and that was all," Lanky gave as his opinion.

Mr. Ketcham seemed pleased.

"I certainly hope you recover the watch, Paul," he said, as he took the hand of the boy he was addressing; "and if I could see your father, and get him to let down the bars a little, so as to permit you to play on the team, I'd be glad to do it."

"Thank you, sir," Paul told him, affected by this exhibition of kindness, after he had suspected the other of being a thief. "You make me ashamed of thinking ill of you. But it would be no use trying to move father. He's bent on curing me of certain habits he doesn't like; and I guess he's right, even if it does hurt."

"Well, if you think of any way I can be of any assistance, please let me know," the gentleman told Paul. "I am very fond of boys, even if I never had any of my own, more's the pity. If you're up this way drop in and see me. And hunt all you like over the ground I've leased."

"We've got about all the game we care about for to-day, sir," Frank told him, "and in fact, part of our design was to try and see you. So we may take a notion to head for the river, and skate back to town."

After they had parted company with the new tenant of the Jones farm the three chums walked along for some little time in silence. Each seemed to be busy with his thoughts; and finally Lanky broke out with:

"He couldn't use that gold watch, and no one in Columbia would dream of buying such a valuable thing from a good-for-nothing like Tiff Bradbury. Now, what could he have done with it?"

"Suppose we cornered him, and demanded that he tell us," ventured Paul; "do you think he'd break down and confess?"

"Well, I've never happened to have any particular dealings with Tiff," Frank replied; "most of my troubles in the past came from Lef Sellers and Bill Klemm, you may remember."

"Tiff belongs to the same crowd, doesn't he?" asked Paul.

"Just what he does, Lanky replied, "and I've heard folks say he's a tough case, always doing something to make trouble. His father is a drunkard, and his poor mother has to take in washing to get food for half-a-dozen smaller kids. Some-

times Tiff works, but most of the time he spends in hunting, or loafing. Only he doesn't drink, so far, and that's the only redeeming thing about the fellow."

"Let's hope that Tiff has taken the pattern his father has set to heart," said Frank, "and will let liquor alone anyway. But even if he's got the watch it's going to be a hard job forcing him to give it up."

"We might promise him a certain sum for it, and no questions asked," suggested Paul. "I've got ten dollars in the savings bank I'd be mighty glad to squander for such a purpose."

"And call on us if you need any more, Paul," added Frank. "But what I meant was, Tiff would be suspicious of us. Chances are he'll deny up and down that he ever saw any watch."

"And we haven't any proof, only that Mr. Ketcham says he *thinks* he saw him pick something up, and hurry away," Paul remarked, dejected again, as he saw his recent high hopes vanishing as before.

"Well," said Frank, as they started to put on their skates at the brink of the ice-coated river, "we believe we've located the guilty party at last; and it'll be queer if one of us can't hit on some sort of scheme to make Tiff Bradbury confess. So cheer up, Paul, the hunt is getting warmer."

CHAPTER XXII

TIFF BRADBURY

"WHAT'LL we do with these rabbits?" asked Frank, as they drew near the outskirts of town, and found the ice covered with ambitious skaters, some of whom it was likely would be clustering around the returned hunters to see what luck they had.

"Oh! my folks told me they wouldn't order any meat at the butcher's to-day, when they heard I was going out," laughed Paul; "though I told them they'd better see Mr. Barnes, and get the regular supply. But I'll fool them this time, and have the girl fix a rabbit stew, after I skin these chaps."

"I mean to do something the same way," said Frank; "so if you keep your word and take supper with me to-night, Lanky, you'll have rabbit just the same as though you were at home."

"Huh! that's the trouble," remarked the tall chum; "nobody cares a rap for rabbit stew in our house but me. Mother says she wants to see it before the skin is taken off."

"But what'll you do with that brace of fat ones, then?" asked Frank.

"I tell you what I thought of doing," replied Lanky, "seeing that I'm going to eat at your table to-night, Frank, I might take them over to Mrs. Gosling, because I've got to do an errand there right away, that I clean forgot about this noon."

"But Mrs. Gosling has plenty of money, Lanky, and can buy rabbits every day if she likes," protested Frank. "Now, if you'd let me have that pair I'll find a good place to put them, and tell you about it afterwards, since you say you can't come along."

"They're yours, Frank, to do anything with you like," Lanky announced, as he handed his share of the spoils of the chase over. "Hi! Bennie, come along with me, and I'm going to give you a good feed when we get home, because you're a dandy, even if you are a yellow mongrel. So-long, fellows; see you later, Frank!"

So light-hearted Lanky Wallace swung away, with the lively little dog at his heels; and they could hear Lanky's shrill whistle high above all the noise made by the boys and girls rollicking on the ice.

Paul turned to his remaining chum.

"What's the idea, Frank?" he demanded.

The other smiled to see how quickly Paul had

guessed that the object he had in view might be associated with the hunt after the lost watch.

"I'll tell you," he admitted. "There's nothing like striking while the iron's hot, you've heard people say. I was thinking we might take a turn around to where Tiff Bradbury lives, and make a present of these rabbits to his mother!"

"Fine!" exclaimed Paul, after half-a-dozen seconds spent in running the idea through his mind; "I reckon you mean that as something like dropping coals of fire on the head of Tiff. He cares for his mother, I've been told, and when he sees us bringing the family of kids a rousing good supper, p'raps he'll feel sorry for what he did."

"Oh! you mustn't expect that Tiff will pull the watch out, and hand it over," he was warned by the more conservative Frank. "The chances are ten to one he's pawned it long ago. All we'll hope is to find out just where, so we can reclaim it."

They headed through the better part of Columbia and were soon in what might be called the slum district. Every town of any size has a part where the poorer people have to live, on account of cheap rents.

"Do you know where Tiff lives?" asked Paul.

"Not exactly, but I'll ask this boy coming along," replied the other.

The urchin looked as though he might refuse to answer a civil question; but it seemed that Frank

knew how to work things. He slipped a penny into the grimy hand of the boy, and held up its mate.

"That's yours, too, if you show us where Tiff Bradbury lives," he told him.

The boy's eyes gleamed with avarice.

"Jest come along wit me, an' I'll point out the house," he told them.

Two minutes later, after walking them around the block, he came back to the very spot where he had met them.

"There's the house, boss, and them kids aleanin' outen the windy is Tiff's brothers an' sisters. Gimme that other cent now!"

Frank laughed, but handed it over.

"You're a bright one," he told the grinning urchin; "thought I wouldn't pay unless you did something to earn the money, didn't you? And so you marched us around the block. Oh! well, it's all right, kid. Come along, Paul, and we'll soon see what can be done with Tiff Bradbury."

"What a vile hole this is," remarked Paul, shuddering, for possibly up to then he had never dreamed there was a district so dirty and ill-kept in the whole town of Columbia.

"It's a tough neighborhood," admitted Frank, who had been in the district before on many an errand of mercy from his mother; "but all the same you'll find lots of decent people living here. Rents

are cheap and lack of hard cash makes college graduates herd with others who can hardly write their own name."

They asked a little girl if the Bradburys lived there, and were told to knock on the third door. An odor of washing was in the air. No doubt someone was carrying on this occupation for a living every hour of every day but Sunday.

On Frank knocking the door slowly opened. A dirty-faced little girl looked up at them.

"Is this where Mrs. Bradbury lives?" asked Frank, and upon the awed child nodding her tousled head, he continued; "tell her someone wants to see her."

"What is it, please?" asked a tired voice, and they saw a poor, faded-looking woman coming toward them, wiping her hands on her tattered dress as though she had just taken them out of the wash-tub.

There was a frightened look on her face. Perhaps she had caught sight of the guns the boys were carrying, and may have imagined that Tiff had been getting himself in more trouble, for he was almost always in hot water of some kind.

"Why, you see, Mrs. Bradbury," said Frank, "several of us were out hunting this afternoon, and getting more rabbits than we could use we thought that perhaps you might be glad to have a brace.

They're nice and fat. You're Tiff's mother, I reckon?"

She seemed surprised, not only to have a present given to her when there was no meat in the house for supper that night, but because they had even mentioned her boy's name. It seemed as though they might be good friends of Tiff.

She smiled, and it was worth something, Frank thought, to see such a look steal across an anxious, tired face like that of Mrs. Bradbury.

"I'm sure I'm awful obliged to you, boys; and the rabbits'll come in handy, for there's little to eat in the house, and six young ones do need so much. I'll be sure to tell Tiff about your kindness, if only you'll give your names."

That was just what Frank wanted her to do.

"Oh! tell Tiff, please, that Paul Bird sent the rabbits. That's all, ma'am. You're a thousand times welcome to them, for we have plenty more."

With that Frank turned, and nodding to Paul to follow, walked away.

He had a good reason for hurrying, because happening to glance to one side he had discovered the very boy they were talking about coming along the street, as though heading for home.

Frank was not intending to avoid Tiff Bradbury. On the contrary it was a part of his hastily-arranged plan that they should meet him face to face, and also

to have him see them coming out of the house where he lived.

Tiff, as usual, was slouching along. His manner was that of the typical young tough who fancies that it looks the proper thing to hunch his shoulders, and seem as "hard" as he can. His idea of course was to impress people with the notion that he would be a bad customer to tackle.

Tiff was staring hard at the two hunters. He saw that each carried a fine brace of rabbits, and the sight rather angered Tiff, whose recent excursions afield had not been very profitable, from lack of a good dog.

Frank whistled to his hound, and the obedient animal came to his heels.

"Hello! Tiff!" Frank sang out, in a careless fashion.

"Hello!" grunted the other, eyeing the speaker suspiciously, as though possibly his conscience reproached him, and magnified his fears. If he had taken that watch he must know that it was Paul Bird who lost it.

"What luck have you had lately in hunting, Tiff?" asked Frank, knowing that in touching upon this subject he was choosing one that the rough boy was greatly interested in.

"Aw! rotten luck," Tiff replied. "Ain't got no dawg, and can't get the cottontails when I do skeer

'em up. If I had a dawg like yourn I'd clean out the hull country, an' we'd feast high all the time."

"I'll tell you a way you can make a nice little wad of money easy, Tiff," Frank continued, assuming a confidential manner, though the other still eyed him suspiciously.

"You don't say?" he muttered, changing his weight from one foot to the other, as though far from being at his ease.

Tiff Bradbury was a sharp customer. He had seen these two boys emerge from the tenement building where his mother and the rest of the family lived; and deep down in his soul Tiff knew very well that their visit must have had something to do with his peace of mind.

Then again the fact that Paul Bird was one of the couple might have told him the visit had a connection with something that had happened not so very many days back.

These things were what made him suspicious, and apparently determined not to commit himself in any way.

"I want to tell you something first, Tiff, before I make you an offer," Frank proceeded, cautiously. "Some time ago, while a lot of us were coasting on our bobs, we had a grand old spill. A stranger coming up the hill with his team, not knowing it was reserved for sleds, made us turn off the track, so that

a dozen or more boys and girls tumbled into a snow drift at the big bend."

"Huh!" grunted Tiff, when Frank paused.

"Paul Bird here was one of the boys," continued Frank, "and it turned out that during the spill he lost his father's gold watch that he was taking to have fixed at the jewelers. It was bad enough to lose a thing his father valued so much, but Paul has been told that he can't play on our hockey team until the watch is found."

"Yuh don't say?" muttered Tiff this time, showing just a trifle of interest, for he lived in Columbia, and like most of the town boys, rich and poor, may have gloried in the victory when the High School team rubbed it into some rival aggregation.

"That was why we missed taking the first match game, you see," continued Frank. "If we had had Paul in line it never could have happened. We won the second through sheer good luck, and owing to the fact that Clifford had a substitute who bungled. But when the third and deciding game comes off, their regular players will all be there, and without Paul Columbia is likely to lose."

Tiff looked at Paul. He even nodded his frowsy head as though in commendation, and then remarked, with a drawl:

"He does play a rattlin' good game, if I do say it; but see here, what yuh tellin' me all this fur?

What yuh think I know about any ole watch? Huh!"

"It's just this way, Tiff," pursued Frank, coming to the point, though his hopes did not soar very high, "we've made up a little purse to offer as a reward to the one who finds that watch. Fifteen dollars will be paid to the party, cash down on delivery, and no questions asked."

"What, fifteen, did yuh say; why, thet's more'n —but 'tain't no use talkin' to me about it. How d'ye 'spect a feller cud pick up yer ole watch so easy after the hull lot o' yuh been currycombin' the ground over agin an' agin? If yuh'd been tuh see me a while back, I might a took a hand, an' found it fur yuh."

Frank changed his manner of attack, as a wise general usually does when he realizes that it will be beneficial.

"Here's another thing, Tiff," he said, impressively, while Paul held his breath in anxiety, "we'll agree to hand over five dollars right now and here, if anyone could tell us where the watch can be recovered; and Tiff, we would also give you our solemn word not to breathe a word of it to a living soul!"

Tiff started, and stared hard at the speaker. He was unquestionably disturbed, and in doubt what to do. Cupidity fought with natural caution in his heart. Dared he trust Frank Allen to keep his

word? Five dollars was a big sum in his eyes, and he knew lots of things he could do with it.

Frank was himself growing anxious. He could see the varying emotions showing themselves upon the face of the other boy.

"Come, what do you say, Tiff; here's the five dollars right now, if you only say the word that will fix us up; and no harm will ever come to you. How about it? I'm doing this partly to save the school team from defeat, you understand."

Tiff glued his eyes on the crisp five-dollar bill Frank held up, and which he had drawn from his savings bank account latterly, for some purpose connected with the near coming of Christmas.

Then Frank saw his teeth come together with a snap. The glitter in Tiff's gray eyes told that his mind was made up. It was too great a risk, and these fellows might be leading him into a trap. There was only one way to feel safe, and that consisted in denying any knowledge of the missing article.

"Don't know a thing 'bout yer ole watch, Frank Allen, and ain't agoin' tuh fall into any hole yuh dig fur me, neither. Find the watch yerself if yuh kin!"

CHAPTER XXIII

A CRY FOR HELP

"FRANK, he does know about it, as sure as anything!" exclaimed Paul, after the tough boy had hurried away, and vanished around a convenient corner.

"There's no question about that," admitted the other.

"He's gone and pawned it somewhere, too, because you heard him almost say fifteen dollars was more than he'd gotten for the watch?" continued Frank's chum, with almost a sob, he was feeling so badly over their lack of success.

"Yes, but we've already looked everywhere we could think of in Columbia, and no one has bought a watch lately," said Frank."

"Then he must have found some countryman who was only too glad to hand over ten dollars for such a fine timepiece."

"Seems as though that might be so," mused Frank. "You said there was no name or inscription on it, didn't you, Paul?"

"Not a single thing," came the response; "but

father managed to discover where he had made a note of the number, and the maker's name. I'm having some placards printed giving a description of the watch, and offering a reward to anyone who will bring it to me. I meant to tell you about that to-day, but forgot."

"It isn't a bad idea," Frank returned, with an encouraging nod. "When a thing like this happens you can't afford to neglect any sort of chance. That might just happen to reach the eye of a farmer or hired man who bought the watch from Tiff, and learning whose property it was, he'd see that it was his duty to return it."

"There's some chance," admitted Paul, "but even if it does happen that might be ever so long after the next game, you know."

"Yes, that's true."

"Can you think of any other way we might get a tip on what he did with the watch?"

"Of course Tiff has one or two cronies he goes with."

"Oh! I've already found out about that," Paul informed him. "When we figured on all those who were seen around, and Tiff turned out to be one, I learned that his regular pals are Art Shumway and Felix Tipton."

"Both about as tough as they make them, too," Frank remarked. "Well, what I was going to say

was this. I'll try and get in touch with one of those fellows. It may seem like a hard thing to do, setting one fellow to snitch on another; but when you're dealing with tough cases like Tiff and Felix the only way to do is to fight them with their own weapons."

"Oh! now I see what you mean, and say, it sounds good to me. Chances are that Tiff spent some of that money having a good time with his cronies, and when they asked where he got it, he may have let them into the secret."

"I'll try and fix it so that Tiff will never know where we got our information," Frank continued, forming his plans as he talked. "A couple of dollars will look pretty big to Felix Tipton about now. There may be a chance for us, Paul."

There was nothing to be done just then, and so the two boys left the unsavory neighborhood.

"I wonder what he'll think when he finds that Paul left those two rabbits with his mother?" Frank remarked, just before they separated.

"Oh! a little thing like that wouldn't affect Tiff any," Paul returned, for he was growing rather skeptical about any good luck coming his way.

"But you'll go along with Lanky and myself on Thursday, if we take a notion to have another turn for more rabbits?"

"And I will, unless something comes up in the meantime to make me change my mind. Somehow,

when I'm off with you fellows I seem to feel a lot different than when I herd by myself and get to moping."

Evidently Paul did not find occasion to change his mind as several days passed, for when Thursday arrived he assured Frank he would be on hand at the same meeting place along about half-past one.

Nothing seemed to have come of Frank's efforts at trying to coax Felix Tipton to tell what he knew about Tiff's sudden accession of wealth.

"I saw him this morning," Frank told the other, as they met close to the campus, with school about in; "I haven't any time to explain now, but I will later on, when we get together for the hunt. Only want to say that my scheme ended in smoke. Felix either doesn't know anything about the watch, or else he's too much afraid of Tiff to go back on him."

When at the appointed hour Frank arrived at the place of meeting he found Paul awaiting him. Lanky and his yellow cur had not yet shown up; but it was early, and doubtless he would soon be along.

Of course Paul's mind was filled with his own troubles, and consequently the first remark he made was an appeal for information.

"Tell me what sort of a time you had with Felix Tipton?" he demanded, as they sat down on a rough plank bench, while the rabbit hound laid his nose

on Frank's knee, looking up beseechingly into his face as though imploring him not to linger from the hunt too long.

"Oh! I talked to him about the same way I did to Tiff," explained Frank. "That is, I tried to stir up his natural desire to see Columbia colors come in ahead in the game. Then I told him I'd give two dollars right then and there if he could tell me where *any one* had pawned a gold watch, and that no harm would come to the guilty party."

"Whew! I don't like that part of it worth a cent," said Paul; "but I suppose we have to do it."

"I feel the same way about what they call compounding a felony," admitted Frank, "and I wish we could get the watch back without promising any such thing; but the way things are going it doesn't seem as though it could be done."

"But what did Felix say to your offer, Frank?"

"He told me he'd like to get that two dollars the worst way, but that honest to goodness he didn't know a single thing about anybody finding a watch."

"Do you believe he was telling it straight, or was just afraid to snitch on Tiff?" asked Paul, trying to keep himself from showing the disappointment he felt.

"It would be hard to say, Paul, but if I had to decide I think I'd believe Felix doesn't know anything about Tiff finding the watch."

"Kept it close to himself, didn't he?" muttered Paul.

"It looked so valuable to him he just didn't *dare* tell even one of his cronies," Frank continued. "Now, I'm going to look up Art Shumway this evening, and try the same game with him."

"And if that doesn't pan out will you be ready to throw up your hands, and cry quits?" asked Paul, despairingly.

"You ought to know me better than that," the other told him, reproachfully. "If Art Shumway won't or can't tell me what I want, then there's another way to find out. I'm bound to get to where Tiff planted that watch, sooner or later. The worst of it is, success will come perhaps when it's far too late to save the game."

"Tell me your next scheme, won't you, Frank?"

"Well, it's like this," Frank returned, slowly and thoughtfully; "I'm going to find out whether Tiff has been seen in Bellport lately. He might have gone down to a big town like that to get rid of the watch."

"Yes—go on!"

"While I'm investigating his movements I'm likely to learn where he may have gone off alone some day recently," Frank explained. "If I find he started out on his old wheel along a certain road, I'll make it a point to visit every farm inside of ten

miles, and show them the poster offering a reward for the watch."

"You begin to make me pick up hope again. I only hope you do strike a clue, and mighty quick at that."

"Well, here comes Lanky and the yellow dog," Frank announced; "but hold on, after what that cur did the other day perhaps I ought to turn that around, and say 'here comes the yellow dog and Lanky.'"

"And we'll get away now!"

Paul it was who spoke these last words, but you would have thought they sprang from the eager rabbit hound, judging from the way he leaped up and down at seeing the young hunters rise to their feet. He gave frequent short sharp barks to indicate his delight, until Frank had to order him to keep quiet.

Lanky was full of vim, and looked ready for business.

"I believe you said we'd trek down-river way today, for a change," he remarked, as he came along.

"Yes, because there's been a heap of shooting up above lately; and outside the Jones and Haverstraw farms I don't think we'd find it as good as another place I know some five miles away."

"Not that island in the river, is it?" queried Paul.

"No, though we go down that far, and then start ashore," Frank explained. "Between there and the place where the railroad runs through the cut there are some places that haven't been shot over much."

"I heard that Tiff Bradbury brought in seven rabbits yesterday," remarked Lanky. "Perhaps he was down that way."

"Just where I believe he was," Frank informed him. "I saw him coming into town, and he had tramped along the railroad track for miles I judged."

They did not take a great while reaching the point where they expected to start their tramp. Skates were strapped to their backs, and then they plunged into the undergrowth, with the dogs ranging on either side.

For a while they struck no game. Then the yellow dog started yapping, and presently Lanky pushed a fine fat rabbit into the yawning pocket of his khaki hunting coat.

As they continued moving along they soon got up another, and this too was bagged. This sort of thing kept up for nearly two hours. By that time they had eight rabbits in hand, and felt that even should they not get another there was no cause for complaint.

"We ought to strike the railroad pretty soon," remarked Frank. "I was thinking that if we

walked a mile further on we might catch the local into Columbia. It would save a five-mile tramp, you know."

"Great scheme!" Lanky exclaimed.

"The fast express comes along first, doesn't it?" asked Paul.

"Yes, and that reminds me I heard its whistle far away down below a minute or two ago," said Frank.

"Then we must be close to the track, I should say," Lanky ventured.

"The brush keeps us from seeing as well as we might," Frank told his chums, "but I think we'll strike it in a few minutes. When the express goes through we'll be apt to know just where the railroad cut lies. I'm working over this way because I have a hunch it's just beyond that tree bending over."

"What was that?" cried Paul, suddenly.

"Somebody shouting, seemed like to me!" admitted Lanky, beginning to grow a little excited.

"There it is again!" Frank exclaimed, "and it comes from where I told you I believed the railroad cut lay! Perhaps someone is in trouble; we'd better run!"

"Whew!" gasped Lanky, "and say, I can hear the express away off there, coming to beat the band! Faster, Frank, faster! We've just got to get to the cut in time!"

CHAPTER XXIV

THE BOY ON THE TRACK

They raced along with the utmost speed. Constantly they heard those agonized shouts rising shrilly ahead.

Suddenly they found themselves on the brink of a shallow cut, where the grade of the railroad had necessitated digging through the hill. On looking down they saw a sight that thrilled them.

A boy was sprawled across the tracks. He seemed trying frantically to tear his foot away from something that held it in a close grip. Since they could hear the rumble of the fast coming express train only a few miles off none of the boys wondered that the poor fellow was acting so wildly, and calling for help.

Without wasting a second Frank led the way down the slope, taking great leaps that promised to land him speedily at the bottom.

He cast aside his gun as he went, knowing that he would have great need of both hands, and could not be burdened.

"Lanky, you run down the track like the wind,

and try to flag the train!" Frank gasped, as he arrived near the struggling figure that was reaching out imploring hands toward them.

"All right!" snapped Lanky; "I've got my big bandanna along with me. That'll do for a red flag!"

Paul was staring at the boy on the track.

"Frank, don't you see, it's Tiff!" he cried.

"We've got to get him loose!" said Frank as he jumped over, and bent down. "How are you gripped, Tiff?"

"Foot caught in frog at switch—near broke my ankle tryin' to pull away. Oh! git me outen this, Frank; I'll tell yuh everything, sure I will, if only yuh save me! Thet's the express train comin'. Don't yuh hear it? Hurry! hurry!"

"Keep still, and let us do the work, I tell you!" roared Frank, for the frightened boy would only hinder their efforts if he continued to struggle the way he was doing.

Frank saw what had happened. The more Tiff had endeavored to get his foot free, after hearing the whistle of the approaching train, the worse he had jammed it.

Frank started to pull, but even with his strength he was unable to release the wedged foot.

"Lay hold, Paul, and help!" he cried, and the other did all he could, but still there was no success.

And the express could be heard approaching at high speed, as though making up time.

Lanky had managed to get a little distance down the track, and was waving his red flag industriously; but when the train whirled around the bend it would be going at such speed that possibly the engineer might find it impossible to pull up before he had gone far past the spot where the wretched boy was trapped.

If ever Frank had to think quickly it was then. He had his hunting knife out of its sheath. The shoe must be sacrificed in order to save Tiff; and it was not much of a shoe at that.

So he bent down and set to work, with the boy gasping out fresh pleadings for him to slash his foot off if necessary, since it was better to limp through life with only one foot than to be cut to pieces.

Frank did not have to proceed to such extremes, however. He slashed the leather lace, and then told Paul to lay hold again. One more pull, with the train in full sight and bearing down upon them; then the two lads dragged Tiff off the track. It was done just in time, for the engine sped past, with a creaking of air-brakes and a slowing up of the whole train.

Seeing that the tragedy had been averted the engineer, who wanted to make up his lost time, once

more started forward; though numerous passengers manifested their curiosity by thrusting their heads from the windows on that side.

Tiff was very near a complete collapse, so Frank spoke encouragingly to him, understanding what the boy must have suffered.

"It's all right, Tiff," he said. "You're safe, and no damage been done, only to one of your shoes, and a couple of rabbits ground up. Paul, get his shoe for him. We'll have to help him to the station, and take him home on the local train."

Tiff Bradbury heard all this in abject misery. His injured ankle was not all that was causing him to groan. Conscience had begun to get a good grip on the boy's mind and heart. For one of those who had actually saved his miserable life was no other than Paul Bird, whom he had injured.

Presently, when they had managed to get his shoe on again, gathered up the three remaining rabbits as well as his gun, and secured their own weapons, the boys announced their readiness to start along the track.

"I don't believe the station is more than half a mile further on," Frank told them; "and we'll manage to get you there, Tiff."

"Lean on me when you step with that lame foot," added Paul.

At that Tiff groaned again.

"Hurts like everything, doesn't it?" said Paul, sympathetically.

"'Tain't that," burst out Tiff, as if unable to hold in any longer; "I'm afeelin' so rotten mean 'cause I done ye sech a trick, Paul, an' here ye went an' saved my worthless life. But I want ter do all I kin ter make it straight, an' I hopes yer'll b'lieve me."

"I'm glad to hear you say that, Tiff," said Paul, softly, while he shot a happy look across to Frank, who was holding the injured boy on the other side.

"I found yer watch, Paul," Tiff continued, grimly, as though determined to keep nothing back, but make a full confession. "An' I sold it to a man down in Bellport. He gimme jest five dollars fur it, and I gut two left which I'm agoin' ter turn over ter youse now."

"What did you take the watch for, Tiff?" asked Frank, not from curiosity alone, but because he had a suspicion there was a powerful reason back of it.

Tiff swallowed hard.

"Ye all knows what my ole man is, an' how he lies around drunk nigh all the time," he finally said. "Mammy works hard ter feed ther kids, but lots o' times we ain't got a scrap ter eat in the house. 'Twas that way when I picks up the watch; an' the fust thing I thinks is thet it'd git lots o' things they was a wantin' ter home."

"Did you spend the other three dollars for things

to eat, Tiff?" asked Paul, evidently shocked at what he was hearing concerning the dire poverty of the Bradbury family.

"Every cent, 'cept thet I bought some shells ter go huntin' with; an' they fetched in lots more'n they cost when I sold the rabbits," the limping boy replied.

"I believe you, Tiff," said generous Paul, and Frank saw that he was winking fast to keep the tears from his eyes; "and you needn't hand over that two dollars, either. Keep it to buy more food for the family at home. I mean to speak to my mother about seeing what can be done to help you. It's near Chirstmas time, and she's always looking around to see whom she can do things for."

Tiff sniffled, and shook his head as though overcome with the enormity of his offence against such a splendid fellow as Paul Bird. This incident in his career might not start Tiff along the road to reform, but at least it would set him to thinking, and no one could tell what was going to come of it.

"You haven't told us the name of the man you sold the watch to, down in Bellport, Tiff?" remarked Frank, always on the lookout for the important fact.

"Abraham Cohen is his name," Tiff replied; "he keeps a secondhand store down on Mercer Street."

"I know his place, and the man, too," Frank continued. "He's got a poor reputation, but we'll fix

it so he'll be glad to turn the watch over to us. Did you sell or pawn it, Tiff?"

The boy fumbled about his coat, and presently produced something that he seemed to take from inside the lining.

"It's a regular pawn ticket!" ejaculated Lanky, immediately he saw the piece of paper. "Now you'll have no trouble about getting the watch back. And Abraham must have guessed it didn't belong to Tiff here. He's a slick article, I reckon."

"I told him it war my granddad's watch," said Tiff, humbly. "I don't 'spect he believed me, but he gimme five dollars on it, jest the same."

"It's all right, Paul!" remarked Frank.

"Then you really believe we can recover the watch, do you?" asked Paul, whose face was no longer drawn and peaked as it had been of late.

"I'm sure of it," Frank told him. "And what tickles me as much as anything is the fact that now we'll have you in line, if that third game is pulled off next Saturday."

"Bully for Columbia!" cried Lanky, "for we're going to rub it all over poor old Clifford, let me tell you."

"There's the station just ahead," remarked Frank. "We'll be able to get to it in time for the local train. Tiff, we feel so good over this that we're going to keep mum about it. Only we hope it'll be a lesson to you that you'll never forget."

CHAPTER XXV

THE ODD GAME—CONCLUSION

THE fall of snow that came along that night did not amount to much, and with Saturday morning opening clear and cold again everybody knew that Clifford would be down with a rush that afternoon, to try to bear off the prize.

Fortune favored Columbia in so far as the toss for the field went, because it was thus decided that the concluding game would be played there.

The news went abroad early that Paul Bird was going to occupy his old position of left wing on the hockey team. It was also remarked, with considerable glee, that while Wentworth, the Clifford player, expected to get back in the game, he was said to be feeling the effects of his recent sickness, and might fail to be the aggressive skater of the past.

The crowd was larger than on the occasion of the first game. As the two teams had now won a game apiece, interest had grown to fever heat. Hundreds came up from Bellport to enjoy seeing these two old-time rivals struggle for supremacy on the ice.

It had turned out all right for Paul. With his two staunch chums he had posted down to Bellport that very night, and obtained the long-lost watch by offering the ticket, and the necessary money.

True to their promise they would not tell who had taken it, except that Paul of course had to relate the whole thing to his father. Mr. Bird told him he had done the right thing in standing by Tiff. He also promised to see to it that the injured boy had a doctor to look after his foot, and that help was given Tiff's mother.

Clifford looked dangerous as they came down in a bunch, with their lusty rallying cry ringing out from dozens of throats. They had evidently made up their minds to sweep Columbia from the ice on this afternoon, thereby establishing their right to the championship of the Harrapin for that season.

Frank and his players were just as confident. The return of Paul to the game was worth considerable to them, for they knew how he could be depended upon in emergencies; whereas Hazen was too uncertain, and kept the other players guessing all the time.

As for Paul, he felt in prime shape to do himself justice. After his enforced vacation he was wild to get started, and prove that he was as good at the game as he had ever been, perhaps a shade better.

Everybody was there. It was evidently sufficient

for Lanky to know that a certain pretty little black-eyed girl who answered to the name of Dora waved her handkerchief at him every time he chanced to look up to where she was sitting.

If Lanky found a certain amount of inspiration from the presence of his "best girl," the same might be said of Frank; for Minnie Cuthbert could see no other player on that broad stretch of ice. In her mind the other six wearing the Columbia jerseys were only automatic figures that answered to the will of the captain and leader.

The great game commenced amidst a hush. Everybody waited to see how things were going to develop. Would the return of Paul Bird really add as much strength to the Columbia team as had been expected? How about Wentworth? Would he play the remarkable game he had always put up in the past?

It was soon seen that things began to have a Columbia tinge. The loyal rooters of the local team, led by ever faithful Herman Hooker, found five chances to let out furious volleys of cheers to one that came to Clifford.

For Clifford was plainly outclassed!

Paul Bird played as he had certainly never done before in his life. People told each other that he was a miracle—a wizard. Nothing seemed too desperate for him to attempt; and what was stranger

still, he invariably succeeded whenever he undertook a play.

For once even the fine work of Frank went almost unnoticed, so wrapped up were the crowds in watching what Paul would do when he got the puck. He could steal it away from the cleverest Clifford players, and with impunity. In vain did they rally to prevent Paul from driving it down toward the opposing goal; for he dodged, and continued to carry the rubber disc along with him, until making a feint that would deceive the keeper of the goal, with a wonderful stroke would send it spinning into the net.

Such applause as greeted his work had seldom been heard around Columbia. When a third goal had been scored for the home team and not one as yet going to Clifford, it was beginning to be apparent that the game would be a "walk-over."

McQuirk, Hastings, Standish, Coots, Adkins, Westover, all did wonders in their way, but it was Paul Bird's day, apparently. Some joyously said that Paul represented a whole team in his individual play; but of course this was not at all the case, for many brilliant plays were recorded to the credit of his mates, which under ordinary conditions might have called for hearty cheers.

When the intermission arrived the score was still three to nothing.

Clifford may have felt that a beating awaited them, but no one could tell that from the demeanor of the seven players. Wentworth had been withdrawn, and Dooley put in the line. There was evidently some hope that he might have one of his good days, and help to score enough goals to even things, and necessitate another inning.

Alas! it was a vain hope.

Dooley played great hockey at that. He did not make any errors to speak of, and when right in the start he carried the puck down for the first score for Clifford, the up-river fellows went nearly wild.

It was only a flash in the pan, though. Paul had caught his second wind, and how he did spin around! It seemed as though he might be in three places at the same time; for he dashed here, there, and everywhere, in the thick of every melee, and usually carrying off the disputed puck while the rest of the bunch struggled among themselves.

Another goal for Columbia! It was greeted by mingled cheers and groans, though the most rabid Clifford backer would have hesitated to hint that there was any taint of a "foul" about the way in which that goal was won.

Frank had shot the rubber into the enemy's net, but nevertheless Paul had been a big factor in the feat.

"Oh! isn't he the bird, though?" called out

Buster Billings, through Herman Hooker's megaphone, when again the Columbia left wing was seen with the entire field straggling after him, and keeping possession of the rubber disc.

"If Paul had been with us it would have been three straight, if Clifford had cared to play out the string!" shouted Bones Shadduck. Not a single voice was raised to dispute this evident fact.

When the referee's whistle announced that the game was over, the final score stood six goals for Columbia to one for Clifford.

It had been a one sided game, and yet never had fellows fought more furiously than had Coots and his team. Things had broken badly for them; they were crippled, just as Columbia had been on that previous occasion, and then Paul Bird had played the most astounding game ever seen on the Harrapin.

Loud and long did they cheer plucky Clifford. The fellows from up there might be beaten, but they could never be discouraged. They would have gladly started all over again, tired as they were, had they been given a chance.

Taken in all the three games were remarkable in that there had been no bickering and ugliness of temper shown, such as too frequently accompanies hockey. For this both schools deserved great credit. Victory had not come Clifford's way, but no one

could say the team representing the up-river town had ceased to put up a hard fight to the last gasp.

Paul was the happiest boy in all Columbia that night, without any doubt. The trouble that had had long since fallen into decay, and for some time weighed so heavily upon his spirits for so many days was now a thing of the past. Besides this, he had covered his name with glory, and that always pleases a boy. He had also helped to bring another great victory to the school.

When Tiff Bradbury, lying on a cot at home nursing his injured foot, heard what had happened, perhaps he too felt thankful, for in an humble measure he had been instrumental in advancing the victory.

Frank had taken an interest in Tiff. He meant to try to put out a helping hand to the fellow, for he believed that a boy who would do wrong in an effort to supply his mother and "the kids" at home with food, might have a streak of good in him that deserved to be encouraged. Tall oaks grow from little acorns, and small things should not be despised.

Columbia High took on a few more airs after that victory over Clifford. No one could find any fault about that, since she deserved all that had come her way.

Of course, as was natural, Bellport let it be

known that there might have been a different story to tell, had her team not been broken up by a series of calamities early in the winter. But then no Columbia student or rooter believed that; for past records would go to show that only on rare occasions had Bellport succeeded in heading Columbia in any race or game.

The main part of the winter was still before them, and it might reasonably be expected that numerous other sports would occupy the attention of Frank and his friends.

There was Walter Ackerman, for instance, with that new iceboat of his, and it was hardly possible that he would remain contented with just one try at Lanky's latest model. He would find the tall fellow always willing to favor him with a dash, and as under all circumstances Lanky believed in being a true sportsman, scorning to take any unfair advantage of an antagonist, the contest must be an interesting one.

With the recovery of the lost watch one of the most baffling mysteries that had ever been known in Columbia High came to an end. But the true explanation of its strange disappearance, and equally remarkable finding, was known to but few. Frank, Lanky and Paul believed that it would serve no good end to betray how a hungry fellow had yielded

to temptation, so that he might get money with which to help feed the helpless ones at home.

Tiff had quite a little siege of it with that wrenched ankle, for a sprain is always harder to cure than an actual break. At last accounts, however, he was able by the use of a cane to hobble around to a mill, where Mr. Allen had obtained steady employment for him.

So far as learned the boy was giving satisfaction, and seemed overjoyed to have a chance to earn eight dollars a week right along. The dissolute father about this time took it into his head that Columbia was too slow for him, and one night he vanished, some saying he had gone to New York. If he never came back the Bradbury family would not mourn very much, as they were now able to move to a better neighborhood, and have cleaner apartments.

Students might come and students might go, but the spirit animating Columbia High must always remain. That being the case there would be the same intense rivalry between the three enterprising towns located along the Harrapin; and many a time and oft were the athletic boys of the various schools bound to meet face to face on debatable ground.

So long as Columbia held to the high standard Frank Allen and his chums had set in their many

struggles for supremacy, so long would the famous old school win victories on these hotly contested fields.

It may be our pleasing task in the future to record some of these gallant deeds that the Boys of Columbia High added to their roll. But for the present we must drop the curtain, and say good-bye.

THE END

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